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Regional Oral History Office  
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ON THE WATERFRONT:  
AN ORAL HISTORY OF RICHMOND, CALIFORNIA

Vera Jones Bailey

MIGRATION OF A WORKING FAMILY: FROM THE SAN JOAQUIN VALLEY  
TO THE RICHMOND SHIPYARDS, 1942

An Interview Conducted by  
Judith K. Dunning  
in 1986





VERA JONES BAILEY  
1986

*Photograph by Richard Spencer  
Oakland Tribune*



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## INTRODUCTION by Jim Quay

It is a great pleasure to introduce "On the Waterfront" to you. I myself was introduced to the project in September 1983, shortly after becoming executive director of the California Council for the Humanities. Both the Council and its mission of bringing the humanities to out-of-school adults were relatively new to me when Judith Dunning came to my office to talk about her proposal. Ms. Dunning wanted to document an important period in the life of the Richmond, California waterfront, but she didn't want to write a study for scholars. Instead, she proposed to interview most of the oldest surviving waterfront figures, collect historic photographs of the port and its workers, and to create from these an exhibit for the public. Would the Council be interested in supporting such a project?

Happily, the two dozen scholars and citizens who sat on the Council then were interested and, convinced of the project's importance, voted to fund Ms. Dunning's proposal in early 1984. Six years later, I now know what I couldn't have known then: that "On the Waterfront" had all the features of a typical public humanities project: a powerful subject, caring scholars, a resourceful and dedicated project director, and uncertain funding.

You can appreciate why even the best public humanities project--and "On the Waterfront" is one of the best--doesn't easily attract funding. In a state focused relentlessly on the future, the next quarterly statement, the next development, the value of such a project doesn't show up in a cost-benefit analysis. Who would care about the lives of Californians past? Who would care about a waterfront whose boomtime is passed?

The answer is: thousands of people, as Judith's project proved. First and foremost, Judith, who didn't just study Richmond, but moved to and lived in Richmond. Like so many project directors, she gave time and life to this project far beyond the amount budgeted. In the language of accounting this is called "in-kind contribution"; in the language of life it's called devotion. Those of us privileged to know Judith know that the project both exhausted her and enriched her, and she has won the admiration of those who supported her and the affection of those she has interviewed and worked with.



After Judith came a handful of interested scholars--historian Chuck Wollenberg, folklorist Archie Green, and oral historian Willa Baum--who gave their time and expertise to the project. Next, a handful of people at organizations like CCH, Chevron and Mechanics Bank, who thought enough of the idea to fund it. Finally, eventually, came the thousands of visitors to Richmond Festival by the Bay during 1985-87 and saw the photographs and read the excerpts from interviews and realized that they too cared about these people. And now, you, the reader of these interviews, have an opportunity to care.

In its fifteen years of supporting efforts to bring the humanities to the out-of-school public in California, the Council has seen two great themes emerge in the projects it funds: community and diversity. "On the Waterfront" embodies both. I think such projects are compelling to us because in our busy lives, we often encounter diversity more as a threat than as a blessing, and community more as an absence than a presence.

"On the Waterfront" gives us all a chance to experience the blessings of diversity. The life details that emerge from these pictures and voices make us appreciate how much the people of the Richmond waterfront are unlike us, how much attitudes, economies, and working conditions have changed. Yet because the portraits are so personal and intimate, we can also recognize the ways in which they are like us, in their struggles, their uncertainties, their pride, and their fates. What seemed like difference becomes part of a greater sense of who "we" are.

In the lives of waterfront people, we can also glimpse how a community grew and waned. Busy with our own lives, we often neglect the activities that knit communities together. Judith Dunning's project allows us to see what we are losing and how communities are created and destroyed. And so, "On the Waterfront" fulfills the oldest promise of the humanities: that in learning about others, we learn about ourselves. For the gift of these twenty-six lives, we can thank Judith Dunning.

Jim Quay  
Executive Director  
California Council for the Humanities

March 2, 1990  
San Francisco, California



## PREFACE

### ORIGIN OF THE PROJECT

"On the Waterfront: An Oral History of Richmond, California," began in 1985. Interviews were conducted with twenty-six Bay Area residents including early Richmond families, World War II Kaiser Shipyard workers, cannery workers, fishermen, and whalers.

I was first attracted to this shoreline industrial town located sixteen miles northeast of San Francisco in 1982 while enrolled in a documentary photography class. For ten weeks I concentrated on the Richmond waterfront, often accompanying the crew of the freighter Komoku on its nightly run from Richmond to C & H Sugar in Crockett. It was then that I began to hear colorful stories of Richmond's waterfront and the City's World War II days.

The question which captivated me in 1982 and still does is--what happened to Richmond when World War II transformed this quiet working class town into a 24-hour-day industrial giant? With the entry of the Kaiser Shipyard, the number of employed industrial workers skyrocketed from 4,000 to 100,000. An unprecedented number of women entered the work force. The shipyards set speed and production records producing one-fifth of the nation's Liberty ships. By 1945 Richmond's shipyards had launched 727 ships.

There were other enormous changes. During the wartime boom, Richmond's population rose from 23,000 to 125,000. The ethnic composition of Richmond and the entire Bay Area changed dramatically with the influx of workers recruited from the South and Midwest. There was little time to provide the needed schools and community services. Housing shortages were critical. Twenty-four thousand units of war housing were built but they were soon filled to capacity. People were living in make-shift trailer camps along the roadsides and the all-night movie theaters were filled with sleeping shipyard workers.

James Leiby, professor of Social Welfare at UC Berkeley, called Richmond a "spectacular" case of urban development. What happened to other communities over a period of decades occurred in Richmond in a few years.





Some of the questions I wanted to explore in the interviews were--who were these newcomers to Richmond and were there reasons, beyond the promise of a job, which brought them in steady streams by trains, buses, and automobiles hauling make-shift trailers? And was this destination of Richmond, California, all that they had imagined?

Other questions were just as compelling. After the war ended and Kaiser and fifty-five other industries moved out of Richmond, leaving this new population suddenly unemployed, what made people stay? And for those who left Richmond and returned home to their families in the South and Midwest, what made them come back to Richmond a second time, often bringing relatives with them?

As intrigued as I was by this new population, I also wanted to know how Richmond natives experienced these changes. In a sense, as others moved in to find new homes in Richmond, the longtime residents were losing their once small and familiar home town.

Initially, I tried to locate people who were living and working in Richmond before the World War II boom. They worked in the canneries, at the Chevron Refinery, or made their living fishing in San Pablo Bay. Most of these first interviewees were California natives, born and raised in Richmond. But the majority of the interviewees for this project came from other places--Texas, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Missouri, Iowa, Idaho, Utah--all to start a new life in California. Each one had a story to tell. Armed with a tape recorder, a camera, and lots of unanswered questions, I set out to record these local residents.

## INTERVIEW SETTING

With few exceptions, the initial interview took place at the narrator's home. Because I was recording a diverse group, the interview setting varied dramatically. One day I might be in a neighborhood where residents, fearing stray bullets, keep their curtains drawn and their lights dimmed. Another day I would be in a home with a sweeping view of the bay, built by a former cannery owner during the Depression.





When possible, I recorded additional interviews and photographed at locations where the narrators had lived or worked. Some of these included the former Filice and Perrelli Canning Company, Ferry Point, Point San Pablo Yacht Harbor, and the last remaining World War II shipyard structures...since torn down. I also spent many days off shore. When interviewing Dominic and Tony Ghio, fishermen for over sixty years, I accompanied them on dawn fishing trips in San Pablo Bay. However, following a turbulent twelve-hour whale watching excursion to the Farallon Islands with former whaler Pratt Peterson, I vowed to continue my research on land.

When I asked some project participants to give me a personalized tour of Richmond to see what landmarks were important to them, all too often I was shown vacant lots where a family home, church, or favorite cafe once stood. The downtown, once bustling with movie theaters, dance halls, and department stores, is eerily quiet for a city of 82,000. I found that local residents are still angry over the loss of their downtown district during the 1960s redevelopment era. Longtime residents spoke emotionally of the city losing its center. Hilltop Mall, built on the outskirts of town and accessible by automobile, was no substitute for a shopping district in the middle of town. The struggle to rebuild the downtown and to attract new businesses is an ongoing one for the City of Richmond.

After the interviewing was completed, there were photo sessions in the narrator's homes and former work places, as well as meetings in which we went through family albums and trunks. Some wonderful photographs and the stories behind them were uncovered during this process. Copies are included in the individual volumes.

## PUBLIC USES OF THE ORAL HISTORIES

From the early stages of this project, both the text from the oral histories and the collection of photographs, have been used in community events. Examples include photo panels and maritime demonstrations at Richmond's Festival by the Bay, 1985, 1986, and 1987; and Oakland's Seafest '87. An exhibition, "Fishermen by Trade: On San Francisco Bay with the Ghio Brothers," produced in collaboration with the Richmond Museum in 1988, was developed from the oral history interviews with Dominic and Tony Ghio.



In an effort to present the oral histories to the public in a form which retained the language, the dialects, and the flavor of the original interviews, I wrote "Boomtown," a play about the transformation of Richmond during World War II. "Boomtown" was produced by San Francisco's Tale Spinners Theater and toured Bay Area senior centers, schools, and museums in 1989.

A new direction for the oral histories is in the field of adult literacy. Nearly fifty years after the recruitment of men and women from the rural South and Midwest to work in the Kaiser shipyards, some former shipyard workers and many of their descendents are enrolled in LEAP, Richmond's adult literacy program, where the students range in ages from 16 to 85 and are 70 percent black.

Our current goal is to make a shortened, large print version of the oral history transcripts for use by adult literacy students and tutors. We think that by using the true stories of local residents as literacy text, there will be an additional incentive for adults learning to read. The characters in the oral histories are often their neighbors, friends, and families speaking in their own words on such topics as the Dust Bowl, the World War II migration of defense workers, waterfront industries, family and community life.

#### THANKS

"On the Waterfront" project has had many diverse layers, including the University of California, the advisory committee, a wide range of financial supporters, and of primary importance, a large group of interviewees. I want to thank all of the project participants who donated their time, enthusiasm, and memories to this project.

Special thanks is due Jim Quay, Executive Director of the California Council for the Humanities, who has been a source of good advice and inspiration from the beginning. The Council's grant in 1984 got the project off the ground, kicking off the campaign for matching funds. Jim Quay's counsel last summer set in motion the completion of the oral histories by introducing me to the California State Library grant programs.



Bay Area historian Chuck Wollenberg and labor folklorist Archie Green have been my primary advisors, as well as mentors, from the early planning stages. Chuck provided insight into how Richmond's transition during World War II fit into the larger picture of California history. Archie Green reinforced my belief that as chroniclers of history we must continue to document the lives of working people.

From the preliminary research to the completed project, Kathleen Rupley, curator of the Richmond Museum, has been enormously supportive. Working in collaboration with Kathleen, and Museum staff Paula Hutton and Joan Connolly on the "Fishermen by Trade" exhibition was an invigorating experience as well as an excellent example of how two organizations pooled their talents and resources to create a popular community event.

Stanley Nystrom, a Museum volunteer and lifelong Richmond resident, has been a continuing resource to me. A local history buff, with a great sense of detail, he assisted me often.

Finally, I want to thank Adelia Lines and Emma Clarke of the Richmond Public Library, Sharon Pastori of the LEAP program, and Rhonda Rios Kravitz and Gary Strong of the California State Library for their support in making possible the completion of these oral history volumes and their distribution to several Bay Area public libraries which serve minority populations.

#### CLOSING THOUGHTS

In my work I am most interested in recording the stories of people who are undocumented in history and who are unlikely to leave written records behind. For me, the strength of this project has been seeing the transformation in how the interviewees view their relationship to history. They came a long way from our first contact when a typical response to my request for an interview was, "Why do you want to interview me?" or "What's important about my life?" And "Why Richmond?" With some encouragement, many became actively involved in the research and the collection of photographs, and began recommending others to be interviewed. "On the Waterfront: An Oral History of Richmond, California," became their project, with a life of its own.





This set of oral histories is by no means the whole story of Richmond. It is one piece of its history and one effort to generate community-based literature. I hope that it will encourage others to record the stories, the songs, and the traditions of our community members. They have a lot to teach us.

Judith K. Dunning  
Project Director

February 23, 1990  
Regional Oral History Office  
Room 486 The Bancroft Library  
University of California  
Berkeley, California





## INTERVIEW HISTORY

Vera Jones Bailey

Two interviews were conducted with Vera Jones Bailey at her home in San Pablo in June of 1986. I had first heard about Mrs. Bailey at the Richmond Museum's quilting exhibition, "To Keep Somebody Warm," where she was a featured quilter. A member of St. Luke's Methodist quilting group, Mrs. Bailey had been quilting since her childhood in Kansas.

During our taping sessions, Mrs. Bailey, still a Midwesterner in spirit, was careful with her words, never saying too much. At first I tried to encourage her to tell more of the story but I soon realized this was not her style. What did come through in our meetings was a practical and hard-working woman who was determined to improve her family's living conditions. In 1937, following years of hard times and dwindling farm wages in Missouri, she convinced her husband George Bailey to move West, with the promise that she would work as soon as they arrived.

In her diary, Mrs. Bailey wrote of the preparations for the trip to California. "We traded our cow in on a Chevrolet sedan and built a trailer to pull. We owed money on the car, at the grocery store, the service station, and the bank. Not any large amount but it was every penny paid." Enroute to California, the family camped out using the mattress, a spring, and an army cot they had brought along. When I asked Mrs. Bailey if they met other families on their way, she told me, "Yes, there were quite a few. We got into a bad rainstorm in Oklahoma. It was pouring rain so hard you couldn't see a thing. We had to pull off the road, and when it let up there was just a line of cars all up the road. It cleared up and we went on."

Mrs. Bailey recalled the heat as soon as they came up over the mountains into California. They came up over the Grapevine Highway 99 into the San Joaquin Valley. Her husband told her, "We're not going to stay here very long because it's too hot." They stayed five years before they got to where it was any cooler.

Within days of the family's arrival, Mrs. Bailey was picking potatoes in the San Joaquin Valley with two of her three small sons working alongside her. "We had to be in the field at five o'clock and you got thirty-five cents an hour...all the time I was working at picking potatoes, I was



keeping my eyes open to see what other things were available and see if I could better myself to a better job."

The family moved into government housing where the rent was low and there was space for a garden. As Mrs. Bailey described it, "There wasn't anything fancy about it, but it did make shelter which was pretty reasonable and worked out all right until we got ready to move on." Richmond, California was to be their next move.

Mr. Bailey did farm work and carpentry until 1942 when jobs opened up at the Kaiser Shipyards in Richmond. George Bailey arrived in the new boom town and was joined by Vera Bailey and their three sons. Unlike the later arrivals to Richmond, who faced severe housing shortages, the Baileys were able to buy a brand new house. Their monthly payments were forty-two dollars, and they took in a boarder to help with expenses.

Mrs. Bailey got a job as a sheetmetal worker in the shipyards and worked until she was laid off at the end of World War II. She remembered that the women were the first to lose their jobs. When I asked her about women's adjustment to shipyard work, she said, "I think they just went in there and took over and done the thing real well."

After three years of hectic pace in the shipyards, Mrs. Bailey said that she had to train herself to slow down, but she never really stopped planning for the future. "My head was always full of things I wanted to do. I wanted to do handwork, and I wanted to make quilts, and raise my garden, so I didn't have idle time." Before too long the Baileys had leased a gas station in Richmond where they worked for a year.

Her husband went into the insulation business, a trade he learned in the Kaiser Shipyards. Mrs. Bailey spent the next three seasons working as a grader at the Filice and Perrelli Canning Company in Richmond. In 1950, the family moved to San Pablo.

Mrs. Bailey found that most of her friends were Midwesterners, from Iowa, Missouri, and Kansas. She doesn't think this was intentional but rather they gravitated together after recognizing common interest. Most people she knew stayed in the Bay Area after World War II. She was always quite certain that she would never return to the Midwest to live.



One sad footnote to this story is that Mr. Bailey, who spent a career in the insulating business, died from suspected asbestosis. A son, who followed his father's footsteps in the trade, also has it, as does Mrs. Bailey. She thinks she got it either from working in the Kaiser Shipyards or from years of washing her husband's asbestos-covered clothing. At the time of the interview, Mrs. Bailey was part of an asbestos class action suit.

When I asked Mrs. Bailey, if, given the opportunity, was there a job she would have wanted, she said, "I never thought I wanted to be a school teacher or a nurse. I used to think sometimes I would like to work in a yardage store. I liked materials and I always sewed." Today, she continues to do handwork, though she isn't taking on any large quilting projects. She said that the main thing she does now, at age 85, is to keep in good health so she can continue to take care of herself.

Vera Jones Bailey thinks her family made the right decision in relocating to California. She and her husband were able to find jobs, "We were willing to work hard, because we saw it paid off." Very simply, Mrs. Bailey told me, "We were satisfied out here. It was better for all of us."

Judith K. Dunning  
Project Director

February 22, 1990  
Regional Oral History Office  
486 The Bancroft Library  
University of California at Berkeley





BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

(Please write clearly or type. Use black ink.)

Your full name Hera M. Bailey

Date of birth Sept 22 1905 Birthplace

Father's full name Earl Jones

Occupation farmer Birthplace Kansas

Mother's full name Lillie Thomas

Occupation housewife Birthplace Kansas

Your spouse(s) George H. Bailey

Your children Earl Richard Rogers Bailey

Where did you grow up? Kansas

When did your family first come to California? 1937

Reasons for coming relocate

Present community San Pablo How long? since 1942

Education (and training programs) Education and other training

Occupation(s) housewife field worker shipyard worker





Special interest or activities

*hobbies*

*my church and many*

Ideas for improving Richmond's image

What do you see for the future of Richmond?



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Family\_Background\_in\_Kansas

[Interview 1: June 9, 1986]##

Dunning: What is your full name?

Bailey: Vera May Jones Bailey. That's all of it.

Dunning: Where were you born?

Bailey: I was born in Kansas.

Dunning: What year?

Bailey: 1905.

Dunning: Were your parents also born in Kansas?

Bailey: No, they were born back east farther.

Dunning: Do you know where?

Bailey: Not for sure without looking into the records.

Dunning: Do you know when your parents or your grandparents came to this country?

Bailey: I don't know for sure, but I know that they were settled back east in Ohio. There is a place back there that they call Jones Corner.

Dunning: Did your parents talk much about their childhood?

Bailey: They've talked some, yes, about where they lived and what they did.

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##This symbol indicates that a tape or segment of a tape has begun or ended.





Dunning: Any recollections that stand out in your mind?

Bailey: One that my son recalls--"Mom, you never did tell me that your mother lived in a sod house." When she was a girl her parents at one time lived in western Kansas and they had a sod house and they were out there for a little while. She told about that. I guess I hadn't gotten around to just pass the word along.

Dunning: Did your parents or your relatives come from Europe originally?

Bailey: Far back they did, of course.

Dunning: Do you know what part?

Bailey: Well, I have some Pennsylvania Dutch from my mother's side, and my father is Welsh or English, a mixture.

Dunning: How many sisters and brothers did you have?

Bailey: I had one sister and two brothers.

Dunning: Where were you in the family?

Bailey: I was first.

Dunning: Oh, you were the oldest, the oldest daughter?

Bailey: Yes.

#### Recollections of Mother

Dunning: Can you describe a typical day for your mother when all the children were living at home, things that you remember her doing?



Bailey: We lived on a farm and my mother worked hard because she always raised lots of garden, and chickens, and kept a house, and sewed and took care of all of us. So she was busy all the time it seemed like. And then she made quilts.

Dunning: That's where you learned your quilting?

Bailey: Right.

Dunning: How would you describe your mother?

Bailey: She was kind and good to us, but we had to mind. She raised us well, both of them did.

Dunning: Do you consider that there are certain things that your mother tried to hand down to you?

Bailey: Well, probably yes, without saying so, just I think a mother will do that by example and little things, say do this or don't do that. If you think about it later you'll realize it.

Dunning: You mentioned that your mother sewed. Did she ever work outside the home?

Bailey: No, not after I knew her. She worked enough at home to keep her busy all the time.

Dunning: I would think so. You mentioned that you lived on a farm. Was it a particular kind of farm?

Bailey: It was various kinds of things. Of course, she always had chickens and gardening. We always had fruit to can in the summertime and preserve it for the winters.

Dunning: Did you have quite a few household chores as a child?

Bailey: Oh yes, I learned to do everything that was being done.



Memories of Father, A Hard-Working Man

Dunning: What about your father, what was he like?

Bailey: Well, he was just a real good hard-working man. He raised his crops and his animals and took good care of them. They weren't highly educated people. They just did the thing that they had grown up knowing how to do.

Dunning: Do you consider there are certain things that your father tried to hand down to his children?

Bailey: Oh, I'm sure there were lots of things. He was an exceptional man, and an honest, loving, and caring father.

Dunning: Were your parents strict?

Bailey: Yes.

Methodist Upbringing

Dunning: I'm curious as to whether there was a certain religion that was important to you growing up?

Bailey: We were Methodists and that's not the overly strict kind of religion, but there were certain things they didn't do, or believe in. You couldn't go to a dance when I was young and you couldn't play cards and just a lot of things like that. Other lady friends that I have that grew up in the same area say the same thing though.

Dunning: Was that difficult for you as a teenager?



Bailey: No, because that's the way it was. Everybody else was about the same way.

Dunning: Where there rules about drinking or smoking?

Bailey: We never heard of such a thing in those days as young people drinking and smoking. The first time I even saw a woman smoking was after I was married and had moved to Kansas City. Then I went into a restroom somewhere and there was a lady in there with a cigarette. So I was pretty naive, I guess.

### Early Education in a Country School

Dunning: What schools did you go to when you were young?

Bailey: I went to country school for the first few years. Then we moved to a district that brought us into the little town to school where there were the larger schools. I went there until I got through with high school.

Dunning: What was the country school like?

Bailey: It was of course all the grades in one room. It was just nice times. At Christmas times I remember that we would get in the sled and go to the schoolhouse for Christmas programs. There was always a big tree in the school, packages of candy and things from the school teacher. It was quite nice.

Dunning: Was there just one school teacher for all of them?

Bailey: One school teacher for all the room.

Dunning: Did you have that same school teacher for many years?





Bailey: I don't remember the teachers changing too much. After we went to the town for school, there were two classes in a room because there were more children. I went back and visited that schoolhouse after fifty years of being married and went to the schoolhouse and walked through the building and upstairs to the auditorium where I had been in plays. It was quite exciting.

Dunning: Did you recognize a lot of the area?

Bailey: Yes, yes.

Dunning: Have you been back to visit often?

Bailey: No.

Dunning: Was that about the first time?

Bailey: That's the first time I had been there. The only time.

Dunning: Did you have any favorite subjects when you were in school?

Bailey: Well, my mother told me that she could teach me to sew and to cook and so I didn't need to take those subjects. I remember that. One that I disliked was Latin.

Dunning: That's probably not unusual.

Bailey: No, I wouldn't think so. But the others weren't so bad.

Dunning: Did your parents want you to follow a certain occupation?

Bailey: No, they never seemed to. They just let me take whatever I wanted to.

Dunning: Did they encourage you in any particular direction?



Bailey: No. I took some music lessons and I decided I didn't like having to go. My transportation didn't suit me.

### Expectations as a Teenager

#### Marriage at Age Nineteen

Dunning: As a teenager, do you remember some of your ambitions, what you wanted to do in your life?

Bailey: I don't remember thinking too far ahead. I just done a little traveling as soon as I was old enough to go with some of the relatives, and I always enjoyed that an awful lot.

Dunning: Did you ever have certain visions of what your life was going to be like?

Bailey: Oh, I was going to be a wife and mother like my mother had been. I wanted a family and so that was what I was expecting to do.

Dunning: How soon after you finished high school did that happen?

Bailey: Not very long. I got married when I was nineteen.

Dunning: How did you meet your husband?

Bailey: It was on one of the trips I had gone with an uncle and aunt to western Kansas. George was working for my uncle stacking hay. My uncle had a bunkhouse and several boys that worked there for him. They stayed there on the farm but they came into the house to eat.



Bailey: So we had a chance to get acquainted with them. Then George went back to Kansas City where he had a job and worked back there later.

I just wrote to him at first. I didn't see him again for a year. Then my mother said, "Why don't you invite him to come out?"

I said, "I already have."

Dunning: You knew you were interested?

Bailey: Yes. So then we started going together. He started coming out--he couldn't come but about once a month. He had to come on the train. This went on until I was old enough to get married, I thought.

Dunning: Nineteen. Probably at that time it was the age that most of your friends were getting married?

Bailey: I thought I was plenty old enough, but after I was married I felt quite a few times that if it had been

Bailey: handy I would like to ask my mother things. You think you're just pretty smart when you get to be nineteen.

#### Depression\_Times\_in\_Missouri

Dunning: Where did you move after you got married?

Bailey: We lived in Kansas City for a while and then we went down to the farm in Missouri where his folks were. We lived down there for about twelve years.

Dunning: That must have been a big move for you away from Kansas?



Bailey: It was kind of unexpected that I was going to go that far away from my parents, but that's what we did. It didn't seem like times were very good after we got down there. Finally we decided we had to make a change so by that time my brother was in California and a cousin was in California. They said work was pretty good out here so I said, "If you go to California, I'll work." I had never worked. So that's when we were getting ready to come to California.

Dunning: I would like to hear a little more about that time in Missouri. Were you actually living and working a farm?

Bailey: Yes. My husband and my father-in-law farmed together. We lived just a half a mile down the road from them. We raised lots of strawberries and different things like that that you can put on the market. Watermelons,

Bailey: cantaloupes, as well as corn, and wheat, and so on. We had a bad season of hailstorms and it ruined the crops one year and another year some crown bore\* got into the strawberries and we didn't have a good crop of those, so that was making it kind of hard for us.

Dunning: Are we talking about the early 1930s now, or what year?

Bailey: Yes, between '25 and '37 is when we lived in Southwest Missouri.

Dunning: So you were in Missouri during the height of the Depression?

Bailey: Yes, that's right. So we decided that we had to get out of there.

Dunning: How was the Depression affecting that area?

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 \*[Crown bore is a little white worm that gets inside the roots and heart of the strawberry plant and cuts them off. V. J. Bailey]





Bailey: There wasn't much work around there for a man. If he wanted to go and work off of these farms, sometimes when there was slack seasons the wages were so poor, a dollar an hour maybe. I've seen the time when you could hire a man for one dollar a day.

Decision to Move to California, 1937

Dunning: At that time did you have your three children?

Bailey: Yes. I had four children but I lost one of them when she was just about four years old. One thing, the children were young enough that the Depression never bothered them any. They had everything they needed as far as clothes and food and all that. The future didn't look very good so we figured we had to do something different.

Dunning: Were there many other people leaving your area for California?

Bailey: Yes. I had heard about a lot of people that were going out to California. Some were going just for seasons and working down in the Valley in the crops during the summertime, but when we left we left Missouri for good. We didn't intend to go back and we never did, only to visit.

Dunning: Why do you think you were different from other people?

Bailey: I don't know. I guess we just felt like we didn't want to go back to Missouri and try it again. But I know that after we had worked out here a while I heard some people saying that they were going to go back. They were just saving their money and they were going to go back there and they were going to do this and that. Well, maybe they would go back there a while, and



Bailey: pretty soon they would be back to California again. I didn't feel like I had ties enough in Missouri to hold me, because by that time my family was getting out here to California. My husband's family, of course, was still back there. But we just had to make a break from them to come out here.

Dunning: That must have been fairly tough I would think?

Bailey: It was hard, and it was hard for them to give up the children, you might say.

Dunning: Grandchildren?

Bailey: Yes. But we went out to see them about once a year and they were out here a time or two. Then in later years she used to come out quite often. We would bring her out, give her the money to come on the plane, or something, so she could be out here with us.

#### Images of California

Dunning: What were the first things that you ever heard about California? Did you have a certain image of it?

Bailey: You know, when I was going to school and studying geography and they had the pictures in the geography books about the grape vineyards and the wonderful big lumber mills in the north and everything. I thought, well this is sure nice but I'll never get out to California. That's too far away. I thought of that a number of times as something that I thought would be nice to do, not knowing that I would really be there.



Stories of Dust Bowl Migrants

Dunning: Did you hear many stories of what people would call the Okies, or the Dust Bowl migrants?

Bailey: Yes, I did.

Dunning: I would really like to hear as much as you remember about that.

Bailey: There was that period when they had all those dust storms and it was very bad for people down in that area. A lot of them were leaving and coming west. The movie called Grapes of Wrath, my husband liked to watch that because he said that seemed pretty real to him. So I think that's when a lot of people began to come out to California and work for a while and go back then maybe, and they're trying to hold on a little longer, and then finally they began to give up and come out and stay. That was back before the war started in 1942.

Dunning: Did you hear much about discrimination against people moving out to California when you were still back in Missouri?

Bailey: The farmers needed people quite a lot to do the work because they weren't using quite as much machinery then as they do now. They needed a lot of people to do the different work. They could go into the fields but it was kind of bad because the children weren't always getting taken care of by those families like they ought to be. They were camping out maybe under trees for a long time, and I don't know if they got the schooling as well as they had ought to.

Dunning: I've heard some stories about the children of Okies really having a very hard time in the public schools in California because they didn't have nice clothes and sometimes they would come to school hungry, and--



Bailey: That could be.

Dunning: Would you consider yourself an Okie?

Bailey: No, because I didn't live in Oklahoma.

Dunning: It seems like a lot of people now refer to Okie as someone from Oklahoma, Missouri, or Arkansas.

Bailey: We felt a little different about it I guess. We weren't in the Dust Bowl area. Maybe that's what made a difference.

Dunning: What part of Missouri were you living in?

Bailey: We were living in the southwest part, not very far from the Arkansas line.

Dunning: Once you decided to come to California, what year was that?

Bailey: That was 1937, in May.

#### Convincing\_Husband\_to\_Come\_to\_California

Dunning: Do you remember the moment that you made the decision?

Bailey: No, we worked up to this part kind of gradually. Of course, I had made up my mind that's what I wanted to do so I had to get this idea over.

Dunning: You had to convince your husband?

Bailey: And give him time to think about it. George had tried to go away to work a couple of times and had gone on up into Idaho but he didn't come home with enough money to make it worthwhile. I didn't like that. I was having





Bailey: to be alone while he was gone for several weeks. Maybe I would go out and visit my folks during that time and take my boys. They even started at school there in the fall once. They of course loved it, being out there on the farm with their granddad and all these animals. They played with the little colts. They got so brown he called them his little Mexican boys. But that was nice for them, too.

Dunning: You're really the person that decided you were going to come to California?

Bailey: I was going to try to get my husband to do it and he did listen to me. And I kept my word. When I got out here the first thing I did was get me a job so that I could help out.

#### Trip West:--Hauling a Trailer

Dunning: I would like to hear about that job, but first I would like to hear about your actual trip to California. I'm wondering, did you sell your farm?

Bailey: We didn't own a farm. We were renting. But we sold our furniture, most all of it. We did pull a trailer behind a car. We sold a cow, two cows, and bought a Chevrolet sedan and then we pulled this trailer behind it so that we could bring more things that way.

Dunning: What did you have room to take with you? What did you choose?

Bailey: Of course, you take your clothes, and your dishes and your bedding and things like that. And we had a mattress and a springs. Then we had an army cot. The



Bailey: children were kind of small then so with the car seats we could camp out. That's what we did nights. I wasn't very brave, but then I didn't complain.

Dunning: Would you just pull over at the side of the road?

Bailey: Yes, we did that some of the times.

Dunning: Did you see many other people leaving the area about the same time?

Bailey: Yes, there was quite a few. We got into a bad rainstorm when we got down into Oklahoma. It was pouring rain so hard you couldn't see a thing. We had to pull off the road, and when it let up there was just a line of cars all up the road. It cleared up and we went on. But we had all our things covered up in our trailer.

Dunning: Was it an open trailer?

Bailey: Yes, it was. We had it covered up somehow or everything would have been wet. We had a canvas over it. We didn't know about plastics yet then. I don't know what we did without plastics.

Dunning: What would you do for food?

Bailey: We carried food along and stopped and bought food on the way.

Dunning: How were the roads at that time?

Bailey: They were pretty good.

Dunning: When you left Missouri, what route did you take?

Bailey: I think it was Route sixty or sixty-six. I forget now which one it was that we came out.



Dunning: You took a southern route?

Bailey: Yes, because we wanted to go into Ocean Park in southern California. That's where my brother was.

My brother was out here, him and his wife, working, so we went to their house and stopped off there for about three days and visited them before we came on up to Shafter.

Dunning: How long was the whole trip?

Bailey: I don't remember how many days we were on the road. Not too many, I guess.

Dunning: Did you drive?

Bailey: No, I didn't drive any of the way. I didn't drive much then. But I soon got behind that wheel after we got out here and I needed to be. I had driven always, but long years back we had had a car that you had to crank, and I didn't drive it very much. But later on then I drove anywhere I needed to.

Dunning: What were some of your first impressions of California?

Bailey: Hot, as soon as we came up over the mountains. We came up over Grapevine highway 99 into the San Joaquin Valley to Wasco first, then to Shafter.

Dunning: What month did you come?

Bailey: It was May. And my husband says, "We're not going to stay here very long, it's too hot." We stayed five years before we got to where it was any cooler.

Dunning: You said you went from southern California where you were visiting relatives up to Shafter?

Bailey: Shafter and Wasco.



Dunning: Where are they?

Bailey: They're right in the San Joaquin Valley.

Dunning: Did you have any trouble getting into California across a border?

Bailey: No. We thought we might and were ready to show all that we were carrying, but we had no problem.

Dunning: I guess it was an earlier period where people were actually being turned away?

Bailey: I don't suppose they checked us quite as close as some of the ones that come from other states. I know we were just prepared to unload and show them whatever we had. "Oh that's all right." They had said. We just ran on through.

Dunning: Do you recall them asking whether you had jobs in California?

Bailey: I don't remember whether they asked us that or not. Of course, we had relatives where we were going to, you see.

Dunning: You had relatives in the San Joaquin Valley also?

Bailey: I had a cousin there and he had been telling us we could come to their house because they had a large house rented and we could stay there for a little while until we got settled. We did stay with them for about a month, I suppose. We both went right to work.







Vera Jones and cousin Nydene Thomas.  
Taken after eighth grade graduation,  
1919.



The Jones and Bailey Families, San Joaquin Valley, California, Circa 1941



Left to right: Earl Jones, Lillie May Jones, Virgil Jones, Vera May Jones, Floyd Jones.



A family dinner. Left to right: Floyd Jones, Earl Bailey, Helen Jones, Roger Bailey, Richard Bailey, George Bailey, Vera Jones Bailey.





Vera Jones Bailey and George Bailey,  
San Joaquin Valley, circa 1941.



First Job in the San Joaquin Valley

## Working in the Fields

Dunning: How soon after you arrived did you start working?

Bailey: Just in a day or two. We thought that was pretty fine.

Dunning: Would you describe your job for me?

Bailey: My husband went out in a field where they were bailing hay. Of course, he had been a farmer and he had no problems getting a job there. I went out where they were picking up potatoes and I got me a job. I took my boys right with me.

Dunning: How old were they at the time?

Bailey: Let's see. The two oldest ones were big enough to help me a little bit. I would put them down there on the end of the row and they would pick up until they met me. That helped a little and besides I could be taking care of them that way.

The cousin's wife, she was out there working too, so I went out with her. That's how I got onto it. I guess they just needed about everybody that was available that season to do the fieldwork. We done that for a few years. You see, in seasonal work you do one thing at a certain time and then later on it's another one. After potato season is over then you go into fruit work maybe.

Well, I worked in the potatoes as I said, picking up potatoes. Then the next year I got myself into the sheds where I could work on the grading machine where they ran them over the graders and sorted them. In the





Bailey: wintertime I was cutting potatoes for seed potatoes. That's inside the shed somewhere, too. That's how I started working.

Then in the fall later on it was picking grapes. Then I got into the packing shed where they put the nice fruit all in the little wrappers and rolled them and then boxed them all up and got them ready for shipping.

Dunning: Did you prefer working inside the shed?

Bailey: Yes, I did.

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Bailey: All the time I was working at picking up potatoes I was keeping my eyes open to see what other things were available and see if I could better myself to a better job. So I did move along to other things.

#### Daily Schedule

Dunning: When you first started picking the potatoes, could you give me an idea of a typical daily schedule? With your children?

Bailey: We had to be in the field at five o'clock and you got thirty-five cents an hour. I think you worked ten hour. And it was hot. Not everyday too hot. But then I carried a big jug of lemonade for one thing because I thought that would be good. You work a few minutes, then you have a few minutes to sit down and rest, catch your breath before they're ready for you again. But nowadays everything is done with machinery.



Dunning: Would your children be out in the fields for the ten hours also?

Bailey: Yes.

Dunning: That must have been kind of difficult.

Bailey: They didn't seem to mind. They just ran around there and played and had their little scraps and helped out.

Dunning: Were there many other children?

Bailey: Yes.

Dunning: Was there any move towards unionizing the workers when you started?

Bailey: Not at that time they hadn't started any of that yet.

Dunning: While you were working in the San Joaquin Valley, did that occur? Did you see any moves towards organizing the farmworkers?

Bailey: I think it was after we had left there when Chavez started trying to make unions for the workers and having trouble. We never had any problems or anything to come up. I had it pretty good. We finally lived on one of the ranches there, and whenever the work was available I was one of the first ones that could go out to the grape fields or whatever it was going. Seasonal work was pretty good for me because I could be at home part of the time, in-between times, and take care of things there. We got into what they call government housing and had space there where I could grow a nice garden. That's where we were living when we moved to Richmond.



## Government Housing

Dunning: You were living in the government housing?

Bailey: Yes.

Dunning: Was that in Wasco?

Bailey: That was near Shafter.

Dunning: What was the government housing like?

Bailey: Well, it was very low rent and pretty good little space and just some little houses that was big enough to accommodate us. There wasn't anything fine about it, but it did make shelter which was pretty reasonable and worked out all right until we got ready to move on.

Dunning: Were there many other people from Missouri that located near you in the San Joaquin Valley?

Bailey: There were people there from Kansas and different places. In order to get into this government housing you had to have certain physical examinations and pass standards in order to get in. So you had pretty nice people around you.

Dunning: Physical standards? They just wanted to check to make sure you didn't have disease?

Bailey: They were checking for TB. That was one of the main things.

Dunning: Was there quite a bit of TB around?

Bailey: They still hadn't got it under control at that time and so they were checking everybody for that, which I guess was a real good thing.



Dunning: What would you consider some of the hardest parts of working in the fields?

Bailey: It is stoop work. You got to have kind of a strong back and as they say, a weak mind, to handle that very long. But I didn't do it too long. A couple of years or so and I was into the sheds where I worked inside.

Dunning: Did you ever regret your move to California in those early years?

Bailey: No.

Dunning: Were you ever homesick?

Bailey: No. See, I had been living away from my family ever since I had got married anyway, so that I hadn't been used to being around them. It didn't bother me as much to leave the friends and my in-laws, so I was all right myself. I kept busy. That's it, too, you see.

Dunning: It seems like you must have had a very hectic schedule?

Bailey: Yes. Busy, getting up and going. I didn't even have a washing machine at first. I was working hard to save some money to get a washing machine.

Dunning: Did you get it?

Bailey: I got it, yes.

Dunning: You seem like you are really a determined woman.

Bailey: Oh, yes. When I had started out I wanted to get a new couch, so I just saved my money until I got enough money put together to buy the couch I wanted. One by one, things can be handled.

Dunning: How did your husband adjust?





Bailey: He seemed to be fine. He worked hard.

Dunning: Did you have much contact with people that were native Californians?

Bailey: Not very many because it just didn't seem like there were so many around where we worked. Once in a while we would run onto one that said they were a native Californian, and that was almost a rarity. Maybe it's depending on what you did.

### Schooling for the Children

Dunning: How did your children adjust?

Bailey: Oh, they liked it fine I'm sure. They were happy.

Dunning: How soon did they start going to school?

Bailey: Just as quick as the school started in fall, why they were right there in school. I never thought of anything else but having them in school. They never missed a day.

Dunning: So they were just in the fields when school was out?

Bailey: Right.

Dunning: You mentioned that you were living in government housing part of the time. Were schools part of that?

Bailey: The bus picked them up there and took them to the school and then brought them back. They had a little while there by themselves without me, but it was better then than it is now because the children just played right there around home. They had their bicycles and one of the boys, he would get him a little job. When



Bailey: the milk truck was delivering milk he worked on the milk truck just while it was right around there, helping the man, making fifty cents a day. That was his own idea. He just went out and asked him.

Dunning: I think he learned from his mother.

Bailey: He was always working. He went downtown there when he wasn't over fifteen or sixteen. I don't think he was sixteen yet. He got him a job at the grocery store, and he was late getting home that night. He said, "Well, if you had just looked in the grocery store down there you would have found me."

Just the minute we came to Richmond he was right straight down and got him another job in the grocery store.

Dunning: Do your children talk much about that period of their lives?

Bailey: Not too much, no.

Dunning: Do you think they actually remember the move from Missouri to California?

Bailey: Well, two of them do. The two older boys remember that very well, but the youngest one was only five and he says he don't remember too much about things back there.

Dunning: Do they consider themselves Californians?

Bailey: Oh, I think they do pretty much, yes.

Dunning: Before we move on to your coming to Richmond, is there anything you would like to add about those years that you worked on the farms. Are there any events or memories that you have that you think should be recorded about that period of time?



Bailey: No, I guess not.

News About Shipyard Work in Richmond, Early 1940s

Dunning: How did you first hear about Richmond?

Bailey: My husband was working as a carpenter at that time before we left the San Joaquin Valley. He was helping build government camps and these shelters that they built for the Japanese. He and my cousin came up to the Richmond area to look for a job. At that time they thought maybe they would get a job over at Pittsburg. But it was raining pretty much and people weren't able to get out and work building camps right then so well, so they thought they would go up and see what was going on about the shipyards. So they got work down at Yard No. 3 building the coffer dams for where they lay the keel for the ships. [long pause]

Dunning: Did they come back and tell you about this or did they just start working immediately?

Bailey: They went to work and my husband was staying up here. Then this cousin's wife came on up. They didn't have a family so they were just renting a little place so she came on up. They got a place in San Francisco, and then my husband was staying there and they were coming back and forth across the bay to work.

Then I came up and brought the children along and stayed a few days and began to look for a place to live. I was having an awful time trying to find any place where they take children.



Moving to Richmond, 1942

Dunning: This was 1942?

Bailey: Yes, in the spring. I told my husband, "I think we're going to have to buy a house."

He said, "Now, how can we do that?"

So I said, "Well, I think I've found a way." I had gone to a real estate man that did show me how we could do it. We could pay down what we could and then we could have a little small second payment on it. We were making two payments on it, but the big payment was \$42 a month.

He still was pretty skeptical but he said, "Well, I guess if we just lose it afterwards we won't be losing anymore than what we would be paying out for rent." He felt like maybe Richmond would just go right back downhill again after the war was over.

He went and looked at it. A brand new house. It wasn't quite finished yet.

Dunning: Where was this house?

Bailey: It was in Richmond.

Dunning: What street?

Bailey: Clinton and McLaughlin. So we went ahead and bought the house. I went back home, packed up things, hired a man with a truck to come and move us. The man came over and he said, "I don't think we're going to get all this in here."

I said, "Yes we are." Here I go, right up in the truck, helping him pack it. We got the truck packed





Bailey: and he pulled a little trailer behind. Then he came right on up and the boys and I came through with the car bringing a little dog and a few things.

It was getting late in the day and I wanted to catch my husband before he left the shipyard if I could, so I ran out there right quick. He was already on the bus, but I got him off. He didn't know when we were coming.

The first night we didn't have any electricity. I hadn't been there to get it turned on or anything. We just had one coal oil lamp that I had brought along. I had been carrying that all the way from when we had come from Missouri. I think I cooked him an egg over that the next morning for his breakfast. That day I had to get everything going there in that house. Anyway, we got there.

Dunning: That's amazing.

Bailey: Well, that was a new experience for me because I didn't know about this having to go down to these companies and make a deposit before you can get the electricity turned on. Of course, here I appealed to my real estate man again to tell me there's no electricity there in the house. He told me what I had to do so I did all that.

Dunning: I'm kind of surprised that you were so easily able to find a place, because I've heard so many stories of people getting to Richmond and not finding anything.

Bailey: I think this must have been just a little bit ahead of them or something. They seemed to have two of those houses that they were building just like a couple or three blocks apart over there. It was a pretty nice area. I don't remember, I guess I looked at several houses, but that one seemed to be one that I thought we could handle. We lived there nine years.



Dunning: Is that house still there?

Bailey: Yes it is.

Dunning: You must have felt that was a very wise decision buying the house when you did, because so many shipyard workers were arriving, particularly the following year, and they were sleeping in their trailers and cars.

Bailey: I guess they hadn't built all those housing apartments that they built down on the southside yet. It worked out all right that way, and I felt real proud to have that kind of nice house, all hardwood floors and everything.

#### Work\_in\_the\_Kaiser\_Shipyards

Dunning: What was your first impression of Richmond?

Bailey: It seemed like kind of a small town then. It was pretty much spread out. You could walk down the streets of Richmond though, and there was a lot of people that were swarming in there to look for jobs. My husband was working and I was just staying around home with the children all summer until school started and getting things kind of organized.

I would say to him, "You see any women out there?"

Well, he would say he would see a few. I would wait a while and I would ask him again. Finally it was just about schooltime so I went down to the Kaiser hiring hall down there in Richmond.

Dunning: Without telling him, or--?



Bailey: I suppose we discussed that, too. I said, "I think I'm going to go down there."

They signed me up right away but they told me I would have to go to school, up there to a school shop that they had near the high school. I thought now that's going to be putting me off a little bit here. But after about three days they just sent me right on out to the shipyard.

Dunning: Did you get to choose the job? I heard that you were a sheet metal worker.

Bailey: Yes. That was what was available, I suppose, and probably as good a job, since I've seen what was around there, as anything was. Of course, there were women doing the clean up work and there were women welders, and burners, and all kinds of things like that. I went out to the shipyard and they took me to the shop. I was hoping that was where I was going to stay, in the shop. But the next thing I knew, they took me right out to the ship and took me right down that ladder in the hold.

Dunning: This was after three days of training?

Bailey: Yes. I had to carry a little box of tools down that long ladder. No stair steps. But then I accomplished that. I always did say--whatever the other people have done, I can do too. That's always worked out pretty well for me.

But I was out there in the shop a while and then they sent me back to the ship again. They sent me to the warehouse in Point Richmond, an expeditor, to bring supplies in that they wanted. I worked on every one of those ships. I think it was forty-two ships it seemed to me like they built there at Yard Three. Whatever the number was, I worked on every one of them.



Dunning: It was something like a total of seven hundred and twenty-seven ships altogether.

Bailey: In all three yards, yes.

Dunning: Yes. Well, that was quite a switch for you from working in the fields.

Bailey: Yes, it wasn't it. You were talking about the Okies. Now there were some of them out in the shipyards. This one woman particularly, she wasn't working very hard. She was just kind of taking it easy and going along. Just going to take her money all back to Arkansas or Oklahoma with her and do this and do that.

#### Daily Schedule in the Shipyards

Dunning: Could you describe a typical day at the shipyards when you first started working, what you would be responsible for, and what exactly a sheet metal worker is.

Bailey: This department that I was on when I was on the ship was installing partitions in what they call their bathrooms, and showers and so forth. They're made out of metal and they have to be set up according to blueprint. You have a welder who tacks them in place. We were drilling holes and putting screws in, and then sometimes we were working overhead where we were covering sheet metal over some insulation or something, several different things.

Then when I went to the shop they had me making up frames that would go around the joints where they joined the pipes, air ducts. Of course, those got to be kind of mitered corners, like a picture frame. They





Bailey: have to be just exactly perfect. It was all right. It wasn't too hard. And cutting metals you learned to use a lot of machinery.

Dunning: And this was all new to you?

Bailey: Yes.

Dunning: How did you manage?

Bailey: Well, I had been used to being on the farm where I knew a little something about tools and handling some tools so this made it a little easier.

Dunning: You weren't afraid?

Bailey: No, it didn't bother me. No, it worked out just fine.

Dunning: Do you think you adjusted more easily than some of the other people?

Bailey: I think I adjusted easier than some girl that had come out of the city could have.

Dunning: Do you think someone with a rural background would have an easier time of adjusting?

Bailey: Well, it's possible it seemed to me. You just get up and head for the shipyard every day.

Dunning: What time?

Bailey: I think we must have been to work at eight o'clock. Then the gas rationing was on during that time and so we had to carpool or ride a bus part of the time in order to save our gasoline to use for other things that we needed it for. We were pretty close to bus transportation so that wasn't a bad thing for us at that time in life.



Dunning: Would you bring your lunch?

Bailey: Yes.

Dunning: How long would the lunch break be?

Bailey: I don't think it was over thirty minutes. But you know, that first year it was a cold, wet winter and the electricity would go off and we wouldn't have any light so we couldn't work. And it was cold and wet. We were sitting around waiting for the light to come back on. I remember that and about it being cold. Of course, you would go out there with a raincoat. There was a big parking lot and you park out a ways and you had to walk in and check in through the gates.

Sea\_Trials:--No\_Women\_Allowed

Bailey: But the only thing, they wouldn't let the women go out when they went for sea trial. They take the boat out after they've got it practically done, ready to turn over, and they go for sea trials to try out everything and see if it operates right. Of course, we were always wanting to go, but we didn't get to.

Dunning: Whose regulation was that?

Bailey: I don't know for sure. It was the head of the shipyard, probably. But then we had to go back on board maybe to do a few little odds and ends, pick up. I was usually one of the workers that went along with the foreman to do that. The inspector would find little things that had to be done before we turned them over to them. We just thought we could surely get a boat ride, but we didn't.

Dunning: Did you ever request it?



Bailey: Oh yes, we let them know.

Dunning: What reason would they give?

Bailey: I don't remember what. It wasn't a very good substantial reason, I don't think. You would ask them and they probably said we would just be in the way, and they didn't need us on board, you know.

Dunning: Do you think it had anything to do about superstitions about women being bad luck on ships, or--?

Bailey: I don't know. I hadn't ever heard that said.

Dunning: How do you think most of the women adjusted to the shipyard work? That was a pretty big change.

Bailey: Well, I hear of women. Every once in a while nowadays that I meet somebody and they say that they worked in the shipyard. I'm always a little surprised too, so I think the women were just going out for all kinds of jobs. It was war and they wanted to help.

#### Wartime Food Rationing

Dunning: Also, it must have been a pretty big increase in salary from working in the fields?

Bailey: I got ninety-five cents an hour, and I think I got it up to \$1.10 before it was over with. It wasn't any big thing, but then I don't think the men were making too much more. The things that you bought didn't cost you so much. You could go to the store and buy a bunch of food and it didn't seem to be so bad. Meat was rationed. Well, you used food stamps. I had a man that boarded with us a while, so that gave me an extra



Bailey: book of stamps. The oldest son, he went into the merchant marines. I had his book of stamps, so I got along pretty good that way.

Dunning: Would you buy all your food with the stamps or just items that were rationed?

Bailey: There were some things that you couldn't buy. You couldn't buy soap and cigarettes and things like that. Meat was one main thing that was rationed. I forget what else now, but there were several things.

Dunning: I've heard a lot of stories about the lines in Richmond during wartime.

Bailey: Oh, the lines. There just wasn't enough grocery stores. I had to go to the store about every night because I just felt like if I go home there'll be things I need in the store. The boys were there and maybe some of their chums were there. I had milk delivered so I knew they had milk. If I went to the store and bought food every night I knew that there was going to be plenty of things for them to eat.

The boys were good. They got up and had their own breakfasts, made their beds and went to school. They were kind of helpful to me that way so that I could handle it.

Dunning: What did your husband think of your working?

Bailey: He had got a little used to it because we had been down there in the Valley for five years and I had been working all during that time, seasonal. So when I said I would go to work in the shipyards, he didn't complain about it. He had seen other women were working too.

Dunning: Did he continue to feel that way?





Bailey: Yes, I think so. No, he never did say, "You ought to just stay home."

I sort of got myself into it. I said I would go to work if we went to California. I didn't mind.

Dunning: You worked in the shipyards for three years?

Bailey: Yes.

Dunning: That seems a lot longer than a number of people I've met. A lot of them have worked there maybe one or two years.

Bailey: I got in pretty well at the first, and then I was still working when the war ended. They just layed us off.

Dunning: How much notice did you get?

Bailey: I don't know whether we had any notice or not. When the war was over they were through with us. Men could finish up what needed to be done. I'm sure they didn't have the ships all finished that they were working on, but they figured they could be a little slower. Get rid of us women, I guess, was the idea.

Dunning: The women, were they let go first?

Bailey: I'm sure they were, yes.

#### Husband\_Begins\_Work\_in\_the\_Insulation\_Field

Bailey: I can't remember how much longer my husband worked there. He changed occupations. He only carpentered a little bit. He turned to be a burner.



Bailey: They would burn holes in the metal where they were going to run a pipe through the deck or the bulkhead. Then later on I saw these men that were doing the insulation so I began to tell George about that. I was working around some of them. He decided that he would go to insulating school. He did that at night after working. He would go for a couple hours. He went to work as an insulator then.

Dunning: In the shipyards?

Bailey: Yes. After the war was over then George still was an insulator for a long time. He worked on power plants near Pittsburg and Moss Landing. He also worked insulating pipes in large buildings in San Francisco for hot and cold water and air.

#### Asbestosis in the Family

Dunning: So that was quite a good idea on your part? It seems like you've really been instrumental in some of your husband's decisions.

Bailey: I've been trying to help along. George worked on a lot of the big buildings in San Francisco where they were insulating for heat and frost. Cold or hot water pipes. And he worked around big power plants. All through this area he's worked, down in Moss Landing and all around. That's what one of my sons does and two of my grandsons. They've followed in the trade. It's a good trade but that's where they got into that trouble with the asbestosis.

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Dunning: You were talking about your family, your husband and some of your sons getting into the insulation business, and you mentioned briefly that that's where they started getting into trouble with asbestos.

Bailey: They didn't know it, of course, at the time that this was harmful. In fact, I've got it myself. My lungs show it.

Dunning: You have asbestosis?

Bailey: The oldest son didn't stay in the trade but just a short time and he got out. He has an auto shop. He's a mechanic.

Dunning: When did you realize that the asbestos was dangerous?

Bailey: It hasn't been very many years. I think it happened to kill my husband. He had trouble with his lungs. They called it everything else but I'm sure now that that's what it was.

The youngest son still works at the trade but he's just about to retire, retire young. He's got some of it, too. I don't know just how bad yet.

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Of course, maybe it would have been a better idea to have thought of some other job that my husband could have got into. But he got into that and he worked at it good and it was a long time. It was a good job and they paid well. The two grandsons are in that now, but they don't use that asbestos anymore. I understand they've been removing all of it off of the pipes over at the university and replacing it with something else.

Dunning: Did you give any thought to health hazards when you worked in the shipyards?



Bailey: No, I don't think so. I know I had arthritis and the damp weather wouldn't always be very healthy for me. I went down to the doctor at Kaiser complaining about my wrists and so forth and he said that was the arthritis, from pushing a drill.

Dunning: Did you use the Kaiser health care often?

Bailey: Not too often, but then it was there. We had the health plan with Kaiser and if anything went wrong of course they were there on the job. My husband would go in once in a while. You might get a splinter of steel in your eye from some of that work and need to go to first aid. I never was to first aid.

Dunning: When did you start having symptoms of asbestosis?

Bailey: A few years back we began to hear a lot about it so I went for a test and it showed that I did have it. I've got some of it in my lungs but I don't seem to be doing too badly yet.

Dunning: How about your husband? When did he first start getting sick?

Bailey: He kept having trouble with this and that. They first thought he had TB. We didn't see how that could be and the tests showed it wasn't. So I think that without anybody realizing what it was--and that was about 1970 or even before that maybe.

Dunning: So he never was diagnosed as having asbestosis?

Bailey: No.

Dunning: But from what you've learned later on--?

Bailey: That's just what all of us feel it was. You could see something there in his lung, up in the top area of the





Bailey: left lung. I expect if anybody looked at that x-ray now they would know what it was.

Dunning: Do you think you got it from the shipyard?

Bailey: I got it probably from the shipyard and from handling his laundry. He worked with this material that was wrapped in a cloth that was just saturated with asbestos. I would shake some of those and wash them because they were such nice cloths to make good dish towels or different things like that. Shoot.

Dunning: Who would have known?

Bailey: Yes. Everybody did that. I don't know if it's going to do any good. I went to a lawyer and I've got my name in the lawsuit they're bringing against the company.

Dunning: I was going to ask you if you were part of that suit. Is that the one out of San Francisco?

Bailey: I expect so. I don't know. I went to Pittsburg to see this lawyer who's connected with labor and he seems to be handling it. The last report I got was that the suit was going on, but it takes years for anything like that to come about, it seems like. Probably be out of money by the time they get it settled.

Dunning: Then who exactly would pay you?

Bailey: Kaiser is who they're suing. Maybe they've got some other companies added into it now, some of those main insulating companies. There were several of them that they worked for. I didn't work for them, but you see the fellows that worked at the insulation trade, sometimes my husband would be with four or five different companies in one year depending on what the job was and where it was.



Dunning: What's your feeling about it? Do you think that certain people were aware of the dangers at that early time?

Bailey: It seems to me like they're coming out now, from some articles that I read in magazines, that the companies were warned and that they were aware but they didn't pay attention to it and the public didn't know it yet. So they should have been doing something sooner.

Dunning: So that's really the key issue?

Bailey: That's probably why they can go back on them, is because they did know.

Dunning: Did you stay with the Kaiser health plan?

Bailey: We didn't stay with that very long after we got through with the shipyard. We had gotten into Blue Cross. That's what I have now is Blue Cross Medicare.

Dunning: That certainly is a long-lasting effect from your work in the shipyards.

Bailey: Yes.

### Shipyard Health Conditions

Dunning: Did the atmosphere at the shipyards change very much from the time you first started there?

Bailey: The ships, after they got them built up a ways, until they were more enclosed, they were so filled with smoke and stuff that you had to breathe, that I was carrying some kind of cough drops all the time in order to try to keep my throat clear. So I know that wasn't very



Bailey: healthy breathing all those fumes from the weldings and burning and anything that was floating around in the air. We never had masks on.

Dunning: Did you smoke?

Bailey: No.

Dunning: How about your husband?

Bailey: He smoked. He had quit though.

Dunning: Were there some big changes after you first started working in the shipyards, especially in the number of people that came?

Bailey: Oh yes, they were flocking out there by the hundreds. Of course, when they had the first ship, there couldn't have been very many people. I don't know how many there would have been working at the time I got hired, compared to what it was after even two years. They would have two or three ships there in different ways. They were doing different things on them, progressing down the line. Of course, there was paint being sprayed on in there, too.

#### Protective Clothing

Dunning: What kind of outfit did you wear?

Bailey: [laughs] You know, I was kind of going through my mind. I wore coveralls, ladies' coveralls part of the time, or else just slacks. It was pretty nice to wear a sweater underneath the coveralls for warmth in the wintertime, because you had to kind of dress warm. You always had to have the bandana on your hair.



Dunning: You would have to tie all your hair back?

Bailey: Yes.

Dunning: That was a rule?

Bailey: Yes, there was a rule to cover up your hair. You could leave just a little dab up here, but I'll tell you, you didn't want much hair uncovered when there was sparks flying around. I had a sweater that I would wear sometimes, and it was fuzzy, and that thing would catch on fire. I was always putting out a fire on my sweater. I don't know why I didn't throw it away.

Dunning: What did you wear on your feet?

Bailey: A good comfortable Oxford of some sort that would protect your feet.

Dunning: You didn't have to wear the steel-toed boots?

Bailey: I don't think I ever had steel-toed shoes. I guess the men that worked in certain parts of the shipyards would have worn them. Hardhats, you had to have hardhats.

Dunning: You would wear hardhats?

Bailey: Oh yes.

Dunning: Did you have any pictures taken of yourself from that time?

Bailey: I don't have any.

Dunning: None at all?

Bailey: No. I should have had one photograph taken somewhere along the line in my hardhat.

Dunning: Do you recall any accidents on the job?





Bailey: Not any real bad ones. There was some little things happening along, somebody would get hurt, but I never saw much of it.

Womens' Adjustment to Shipyard Work

Dunning: In your opinion, how do you think the women adjusted to shipyard work?

Bailey: I think they just went right in there and took over and done the thing real well. Everyone was being patriotic.

Dunning: What would be some of the best memories you have of working in the shipyard? Is there anything that really stands out in your mind?

Bailey: It gives you a chance to see things that are going on in the world in another corner of it. You meet people from a lot of places. That's an experience in itself if you have lived a kind of sheltered life and you go out working in the public like that. Men from everywhere cope with it.

Dunning: How did people get along?

Bailey: They seemed to get along pretty well. I didn't see too much problems where I worked.

Dunning: It seems like there was potentially an explosive situation. Here you have women that are in a traditional man's job, and then you have blacks and whites from the South that weren't used to working or living near each other. It just seems like sparks could be flying.



Bailey: We had a black man for a welder and we had a black woman that worked on our little crew, and everything was fine with us.

Dunning: Do you think mostly they tried to keep some of the crews segregated?

Bailey: I don't think so. No, I think that Kaiser was hiring them all. He needed help and he would just send them out there.

#### Orientation for New Workers

Dunning: Were you ever involved in training the new people that came?

Bailey: Oh yes. It's rather weird when they bring out a couple of big husky men and tell you to show them what to do. You go at this very gently, you know. You don't want to act like you're being the boss. You wonder what they're thinking, but they always were nice about it. I saw some fellows come out there to work. They didn't know what to do. They had to be showed.

So sometimes the orientation got passed on to me to do--

Dunning: Did you enjoy that?

Bailey: Oh, I didn't mind it much. Sometimes I felt a little timid about it, but then as long as they didn't yell at me or anything I could handle it. They probably thought that was pretty funny. I bet they didn't go home and tell their wives right away that they were having to be told what to do by a woman. [laughs]



Dunning: What would be some of the hardest parts of working in a shipyard?

Bailey: It really wasn't heavy work too much. You weren't asked to lift and carry a lot of things. I think it would have been pretty hard for a person that was older. Then I was in my thirties, just about the best time maybe. Or if you had little children you just couldn't go out there.

Dunning: Were you and your husband on the same shift?

Bailey: Yes.

Dunning: Were you always on that day shift?

Bailey: Day shift. I always took the day shift. Some people liked nights but I didn't.

Dunning: So you were able to get together in the evening and for dinner?

Bailey: Oh yes, we rode back and forth from work together all the time. We were together as much as we would have been if I had been staying home and he had been at work, or maybe more.

Dunning: But you were earning some money. Are there any other recollections of either special projects or people that you would like to talk about from the shipyard? Anything that really stands out in your mind?

Bailey: We met one couple that worked out there in the sheet metal department that have been long-lasting friends. I still see them once in a while but I don't see them as often as I used to.

Dunning: Do they still live in Richmond?



Bailey: No, they live up towards Pittsburg. That's why I don't see them any oftener I guess. As soon as the war was over and you didn't have rationed gasoline and so forth, why them and us and our boys went on a little trip to Yosemite. We had an outing together. I suppose that might have been late in 1945.

### Closing of the Shipyards

Dunning: You mentioned earlier that you didn't get any notice about the shipyards closing. I just wondered how you felt when they closed?

Bailey: I think I was kind of glad.

Dunning: Were you anticipating it?

Bailey: Yes, I was thinking about what I was going to do when it was over with, what I was going to do at home and so on. I was going to try to relax a little and I was going to do a bunch of handwork and things.

Dunning: Because there had been three difficult or hard years of working?

Bailey: Right.

Dunning: You mentioned that your husband stayed on for a short time?

Bailey: Of course, he could just transfer over to something else because he was in the insulation by that time, so then he could go into wherever they were. If they were building a power plant somewhere or some big building in the city that they wanted to have insulation done, why he could be transferred to that.





Dunning: Was he in a union?

Bailey: He worked through a union then. He wasn't in a union at first. The asbestos workers have a union, local 16, in San Francisco. He worked on a permit for quite a long time and then finally he got to become a member. When he was on a permit he wasn't always able to get a job quite as readily as the union members would.

Dunning: What does it mean to be on a permit?

Bailey: You belong to some other union but you're still being used through their union. You're working on a permit from the other union. Like he was a carpenter and then he worked asbestos. You don't get all the advantages of a union member.

The youngest one of the boys, he started in when he was about eighteen, maybe. Of course, he was taken into the union just as soon as he was eligible to. He's the one that's thinking about retiring. He's already put in enough years working right with that company that he can retire, and he's only fifty-four.

Dunning: When did you husband become a regular member of the union?

Bailey: I don't remember the year that well now.

Dunning: I just wonder how long he had to be on the permit before he was a member?

Bailey: He probably had to be on there maybe four years or such a matter.

Dunning: Did he become an active member of the union?

Bailey: Oh yes. He went to the union meetings all along. He learned to fly a plane when he was getting up in years quite far.



Dunning: He got a pilot's license?

Bailey: Yes, he bought a plane.

Dunning: What did you think about that?

Bailey: Well, that's what he wanted to do so I just went out and watched him fly.

Dunning: Did you go up with him?

Bailey: Yes. We had our own plane. We took some trips with it for a few years.

Dunning: Were you ever tempted to get your license?

Bailey: No. He let me help him be the navigator. I would watch the checkpoints. I did take over the controls a few times, but you know, when you're in a plane and can't fly it's a lot different than being in a car. You're helpless.

Dunning: I want to ask you about the Filice and Perrelli Cannery but I would like to save it for our second session if that's okay with you.

Bailey: Okay.

Dunning: How many years did you work at the Filice and Perrelli Cannery?

Bailey: I didn't work very many years. Two or three years is all I worked so it really wasn't anything. It was just through part of the season when they needed quite a bit of factory workers.

Dunning: If it's all right with you I'd like to have one more meeting.

Bailey: Yes.



Dunning: We can finish up about the cannery and also I might ask you about some of the changes that you've seen in Richmond and your move out to San Pablo. Also, if there's anything from your notes that you would like to add the next time that would be fine. Thank you very much.

Bailey: Yes.

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Postwar Era

[Interview 2: June 13, 1986]

Dunning: During our last interview we talked about your family background, and today you've given me some of your ancestral records which I will put in the appendix. That's a real big help. We talked about your move to Richmond and your work in the shipyard. Today I would like to talk about the period immediately after the war, and also your work in the Filice and Perrelli cannery. What was it like right when the war stopped and the shipyards closed?

Bailey: Of course, it was like you could go on a vacation and start a different way of life because you had had to go to work every day. I had some other things I wanted to do so I started thinking along those lines. I wanted to do some handwork and I wanted to raise a garden. I hadn't been able to do that. So I raised a nice vegetable garden and kept the family all going along for a while there.

Dunning: Was there an exodus from Richmond at that time?

Bailey: I think there was some, but still it wasn't too much because it seems like people must have wanted to stay and they began looking around for other work.

Dunning: The people that you became friends with, did they stay around Richmond?

Bailey: Yes, they did.

Dunning: Did many of them go back home?

Bailey: I didn't have too much contact with them so I wouldn't know too much about it. I have a good many friends that have come from the middle states in the area where





Bailey: I came from and they've been here for about the same length of time I have within five years and they're still here. They were from Iowa, Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Nebraska.

Dunning: Were you ever tempted to go back to Missouri?

Bailey: No.

Dunning: How about your husband?

Bailey: I don't think so. We could have gone back there and taken over the farm that had been his folks. His sister asked him if he would want to and we didn't want to. We would have to be away from our sons. By that time they were married and we didn't think that we would like that.

#### Midwestern Friends in California

Dunning: You mentioned that a lot of your friends were from the middle states. Was that common? Would you gravitate towards people from your same background?

Bailey: We didn't seem to, but we would find out that that's where we were from after we had become acquainted. These were friends in church, and from groups that I belonged to there, knitting club and different things like that. Here would be one woman that had come from Iowa, and one's maybe from Kansas, and one from Missouri, and one from Oklahoma, and just all in that area. That we were all raised in a similar way we could discuss with each other about the way things were in our life, and it was all similar.

Dunning: Did you find much difference between the southerners that moved here and the midwesterners?



Bailey: In some ways of course there was a difference. Lots of things we were about the same in, but their way of speaking, of course, was a little different. I always enjoyed hearing the southern language. It wasn't difficult at all.

Dunning: Was there much mix between the southerners and the midwesterners, or did people go with their own kind?

Bailey: They all pretty much melted together. It isn't like it is now when the people come in from foreign lands and congregate in certain areas. It just seems like that we were all from the United States maybe is what it was. We didn't separate into little groups.

#### Running a Service Station

Dunning: How did the atmosphere in the Bay Area change right after the shipyards closed?

Bailey: Things kind of slowed down in some instances, but still there was plenty of activity going on around. There was a time after a few years, not right immediately, that there was some more people that got out of work. I know my husband got out of work for a while. That is when we decided to run a service station for a little while.

Dunning: Whose idea was that?

Bailey: That was his. My husband wanted to sell the house so he could put the money into the service station. I finally gave in to that. We were there a year. I didn't think that it was good for him to work as long hours as he was working every day. We had it leased. We just let the lease go back and he went back to being an insulator.



Dunning: Where was the service station?

Bailey: It was on Clinton and San Pablo. We had a house right there on the back of the property where we lived. We were opened up at six o'clock in the morning and I was right out there helping.

Dunning: So you were pumping gas a long time before all this self-service of today?

Bailey: Oh, yes. In the morning when the men were wanting to go to work, all they wanted was just some gas in their car and off they went. So my husband and I opened the station and after maybe a couple of hours then our help began to come in. We had two married sons that were working for us and one son that was still in high school that worked for us and we hired one man. We were quite a busy place there. We had mechanics on duty all the time, and we sold lots of tires.

Dunning: But you decided to let it go after a year?

Bailey: Yes. We made more money there that year than we had ever made in a year before but still we let it go.

Dunning: Where did you move after that?

Bailey: Temporarily we moved down on Barrett Avenue in an apartment. We lived there a few months. Then we rented a house over on the east side of town and stayed there a while and then we came out here.

Move to San Pablo, 1950s

Dunning: So you came out to San Pablo in the late forties?



Bailey: No, it was '51 when we got out of the service station and then we lived in town there a few years in a rented house and then we came out to San Pablo. I forget just what year that was now without looking it up.

Dunning: How did you choose San Pablo?

Bailey: We had a son that had one of these houses down the street. Then we knew that this one came up for sale-- it was nearly new. The house was just a couple years old. So we decided we would come out here and buy here for a little while. We stayed right here.

Dunning: Was there anything that you missed about Richmond?

Bailey: No, not that much. I could always go to Richmond any time I wanted to. I still had my contacts down there. I went to church in Richmond and had the same friends and everything.

### Job Ambitions

Dunning: Getting back to your work, looking back, if you had a choice of all the jobs in the world and could have gotten the training for it, what kind of work do you think you would have chosen?

Bailey: I never thought too much along that line. I never thought I wanted to be a school teacher or a nurse. I used to think sometimes I would like to work in a yardage store. I liked materials and I always sewed and so I felt like, "Now that's something I could have done," I would say to myself. "Because I know about materials." But I never did try to do it.





Filice and Perrelli Canning Company

Dunning: When did you start working at the Filice and Perrelli cannery?

Bailey: It must have been the late 1940s.

Dunning: While you were still living in Richmond?

Bailey: Yes. I had a daughter-in-law whose father worked down at the cannery, and that's one reason I knew a little bit about the possibilities. So I went down to see if I could get a job.

They had a lot of ladies that had been working there for quite a few years is the way it seemed to me. They were always back there taking their jobs and ready to work. And they knew the job. They were Mexican ladies, a lot of them, were.

I got the job all right. I had no problem. I worked a season or two. I don't know if I worked more than two or three seasons. I guess not. I didn't care too much for it. It was kind of hard work. You stand up at the moving belt and grade the fruit as it comes through if that happens to be your job, and that was what I was doing. Of course, some of them are doing one thing and some another.

Dunning: Did you have a particular title in your first job there?

Bailey: I don't think so. I can't think of anything in particular other than I just worked at the cannery.

Dunning: Was there a certain training program when you went in there?



Bailey: No. You see, I told them that I had worked in the packing shed packing fruit and that I had worked on the belt grading potatoes in the Valley. Of course, that was something similar, and that was where they put me, where I could grade fruit instead of potatoes.

Dunning: Grade them?

Bailey: You're taking the bad ones out, taking them off and putting them on another belt. As they roll by there's two or three women standing along here. The fruit is passing by pretty fast and there's a lot of it and you have to work pretty fast to get it ready for the ladies on down the line who are going to put it in the cans.

Dunning: Could you give me an idea of a typical day for you when you worked at the cannery?

Bailey: You know, I can't remember how early we went to work, but I suppose we put in eight hours, so whatever the schedule was for an eight hour day. Not too bad. Of course, it wasn't very far out there to the cannery living right in Richmond. That Ford plant was going big out in there at that same time. My oldest son worked at the Ford plant a little while. But I guess that was a little different than it is nowadays in one of those assembly line deals. They worked them pretty hard to keep up.

Dunning: I know during the war they were mostly repairing and renovating tank cars at the Ford plant. But right after the war, did they go back to the car production?

Bailey: I think so until it closed down. It's been shut down of course a long time.

Dunning: Do you have recollections of what the cannery was like inside? I've been in it recently but it's just totally deserted.



Bailey: It's probably about the same. They probably just left it like it was then when they shut it down in a lot of ways. They may have taken some of the machinery out and moved it somewhere.

Dunning: There's nothing in there, no machinery.

Bailey: Oh, I see.

Dunning: Well, a few of the catwalks are there, and you can see parts of the first aid station.

Bailey: It was such a large place and they had one type of processing in one area and one in another area. I didn't go around to the different parts very much. I just went there where I worked and when I got through I went home. I didn't get acquainted very much down there. It was just different people than I knew and I just worked.

Dunning: You didn't really have friends there?

Bailey: No, I didn't.

Dunning: What was the ethnic composition when you were working there?

Bailey: The ethnic people were good at it and they could probably work it faster than some of us could. I don't know.

Dunning: I just wonder who they were. You mentioned Mexicans.

Bailey: I think they were mostly Mexicans at that time.

Dunning: Were there any blacks when you were working there?

Bailey: I don't recall seeing blacks in the cannery. They could have been.



- Dunning: I know in the early thirties when the cannery opened there were a few but very few.
- Bailey: I do think that the majority of blacks came to Richmond during the war and so that would have--you know, they may not have liked that work very well or something like that, although they never seemed to stand off from anything. They were used to doing all kinds of things in the South, I guess. They picked cotton.
- Dunning: Did you know the Perrelli family very well?
- Bailey: No, I didn't.
- Dunning: Last year I interviewed Joe Perrelli, who is the last surviving founder. He's in his late eighties.
- Bailey: They don't have a cannery at all now do they?
- Dunning: No, they sold to California Canning Company in the late fifties. Mr. Perrelli has never even been back down there since.
- Bailey: I used to have cases of fruit from the cannery. I enjoyed that a lot.
- Dunning: Would you have first pick at it, or--?
- Bailey: Sometimes it would be a gift from my son and his wife and they got it through her father.
- Dunning: What was his job?
- Bailey: He worked among the cans of fruit. Sometimes, there was a problem with the labels or maybe dents, but they weren't always that way. Then they would come up with a whole case of canned peaches as a gift for us at Christmas, which was real nice. I missed it.
- Dunning: How closely were you supervised in your work?





Bailey: They didn't stand over you but they would come through and they were probably watching from down the line. When you didn't notice they had to be there to see if things were coming out right. Of course, they had one place where they got the peelings off the fruit--however they got it off. Then they went to another department where the fruit was cut in half or sliced.

They had one area where they made fruit salad, and that was over across and they would have all the different kinds of fruit. Some of that fruit maybe had been canned and saved until the time they got ready to have the peaches added to it and then they had to open it up and put it back together. That's how they handled that. The cherries or pineapples, that was in cans, perhaps, and then they opened that and added peaches and pears and so on. I knew where they were working at that, but I never did go over there because I had my own place I had to be.

Dunning: Did you have to get special permission if you needed to go to the restroom?

Bailey: No. I guess we had a period or break time.

Dunning: Were there certain rules at your workplace?

Bailey: I suppose there were. I don't remember anything that was disagreeable to me about it.

Dunning: Smoking, or--?

Bailey: I don't smoke, never did, so that didn't bother me. I think there probably would have been signs all around that said "No smoking." They wouldn't have wanted smoking around the fruit I don't think.

Dunning: How about breaks? Do you recall how many breaks you had?



Bailey: You probably had one mid-morning and one in the afternoon. That's it.

Dunning: And then a lunch?

Bailey: Lunchtime, yes.

Dunning: I notice that there was a cafeteria at the cannery site. Did you use that?

Bailey: I never did go in the cafeteria.

Dunning: I've never spoken to anyone who has. Most people I've talked to brought their lunch.

Bailey: Yes, you just took your lunch along and sat down somewhere and had your lunch.

Dunning: What kind of uniform did you wear?

Bailey: We didn't have any particular uniforms but we had to wear rubber aprons and gloves to protect you. I don't know if we covered our hair with any kind of a cap or not. I can't seem to remember that.

Dunning: Did you have a certain production quota?

Bailey: I don't know if they called it that. They just poured the fruit on there and we handled them [laughs].

Dunning: Did you ever learn short cuts in performing your work?

Bailey: No, there's not too much you can do about that.

Dunning: How about the work?

Bailey: Any work seems harder when you first start a job, and especially if it's a new one, than it does after you've worked it a while. You get used to it and know how to handle it a little better.



Dunning: Would you consider the work dangerous? Were there certain hazards?

Bailey: Not too much if you watch yourself, and if you don't put your hands in the wrong place you shouldn't be bothered. The worst part I found was just standing there hurts your back and shoulders and all, standing there with your arms, working.

Dunning: Basically doing the same motion?

Bailey: Yes. Working pretty fast.

Dunning: Do you recall any accidents on the job, not necessarily for yourself but other people?

Bailey: I don't recall. If they were, they were small.

Dunning: I did notice that there was a nurse's office.

Bailey: Yes, most all places have to have a first aid station. Somebody might get a cut or some little something.

Dunning: I'm curious about the working condition. Was there a certain smell, or the noise, and the temperature?

Bailey: It's noisy around. There was always a lot of machinery and it was fairly warm in there. Although the rooms were large it was circulation of air I suppose, but I don't think there was anything that would be unhealthy about the atmosphere.

Dunning: Do you recall changes in the equipment or the machinery during those seasons that you worked?

Bailey: No, I wasn't there long enough to realize anything myself.

Dunning: I know when the Perrelli and the Filice families first came they brought a whole group with them from their



- Dunning: San Jose and Gilroy plants and they were mostly Italian. Were there still a lot of Italians there when you began working?
- Bailey: Part of those people that were working there were Italian probably.
- Dunning: I know a few people have mentioned that there were certain people that just stuck together and they would work together at the same table every single day.
- Bailey: Yes, I think so. They were used to it and they knew how to work together to the best advantage, and I guess they thought, "Let the new ones learn it themselves."  
[laughs]
- Dunning: What were some of the hardest parts about working in the cannery?
- Bailey: I think it was just standing there in one spot and working several hours at a stretch. You had to wear good comfortable shoes and everything that could help you as much as possible.
- Dunning: What were some of the best qualities or advantages?
- Bailey: I don't think there was much advantages to it. It just gave me a chance to make a little money.
- Dunning: Do you recall your salary?
- Bailey: No, I don't.
- Dunning: Were you on a salary or was it more like piece work?
- Bailey: It had to be pretty much hourly because it wasn't as if you were having so many boxes to fill like it would be in the packing shed when I packed fruit down in the Valley. That was paid by the box so each individual





Bailey: could have a separate rate of wages because they kept track of how many you packed. So that's where you really worked.

Dunning: In the packing shed?

Bailey: Yes. You packed just as many boxes as you could of whatever kind of fruit it was you were working with.

Dunning: By the time you started working at the cannery was the union established?

Bailey: I don't recall having anything to do with a union when I went out there. There had been, of course, a union in the shipyard, but not at the cannery I don't think.

Dunning: It occurred to me that it was in the forties that the CIO was established at the cannery and that's why people--

Bailey: Have you heard anybody say anything about the union?

Dunning: I know there was a union but I'm not exactly sure when. I had the idea that it was in the '40s that the union was brought in.

Bailey: When I was working just short periods of time they might have let us work without being a union member if there was a union there. It's possible, I suppose.

Dunning: So you don't remember any organizing of a union?

Bailey: I don't. But after I had gone to work there then they would call me back to work.

Dunning: They wanted you back?

Bailey: Yes.



Dunning: Do you think there were many people in your situation, that perhaps weren't union members and would work seasonally?

Bailey: Probably. Quite a few women like to do some seasonal work. It gives them a chance to work some but still not have to work every day.

### Shipyard Unions

Dunning: Which union were you working at in the shipyard?

Bailey: It was the regular sheet metal workers in Oakland.

Dunning: How active were you in it?

Bailey: I went to union meetings quite a little bit, but I just do abide by their rules. That's all there was to it. We had no problems.

Dunning: Any rules that stand out in your mind?

Bailey: No.

Dunning: Did you continue that union membership?

Bailey: No. I don't think they wanted to keep any women on their books after--men were plentiful enough to handle all the work they had to do. I went from unemployment.

Dunning: Did you ever belong to a union after that period?

Bailey: I don't think so. No. I didn't really work much after that. Oh, I did things, but I didn't go out and take jobs. I used to sew quite a bit. I sewed for some different people. I would do alterations and make clothing.



## Retirement

Dunning: It seems like you were so accustomed to working. You worked from almost the day you arrived in California. Did you miss it?

Bailey: When you quit working you have to almost train yourself to slow down. You don't have to get up and start rushing around so much every morning to hurry up. You kind of pushed yourself, you know, to get out there and do all these things and get them done. Then when you don't have to, you find yourself hurrying anyway. But my head was always full of things I wanted to do. I wanted to do handwork and I wanted to make quilts and do different things like that, and raise my garden, so I didn't have idle time.

Dunning: By that time was your husband more established in his career?

Bailey: Oh yes.

Dunning: How do you think your life is different from some of the young women now who are raising families and working?

Bailey: It must be awful different because they have different ways of doing things around the home and they have more help than I had. And they have more conveniences. And of course they make a lot more money.

Dunning: So you think some of the women today have it easier than you did?

Bailey: Yes, they're bound to have.

Dunning: What did your husband think when you stopped working?



Bailey: I think he was glad that I didn't need to work anymore. The children were all raised and married so we could begin to take it a little easier.

Dunning: You both worked awfully hard.

Bailey: Yes, we did work hard for several years there trying to make up for not getting started on it soon enough.

Dunning: Is there anything else you would like to add about the Filice and Perrelli Cannery?

Bailey: I don't know of anything.

Dunning: I noticed recently there was a reunion of cannery workers in Richmond.

Bailey: Was there?

Dunning: I wondered how many people went?

Bailey: I don't know. They probably had a lot of people that had been there a long time.

#### Changes in Richmond ##

Dunning: Now that you've been living in San Pablo for so long, do you see Richmond in a different way? I'm wondering how you've seen the changes in Richmond?

Bailey: I don't keep up much on what goes on down there. I don't have to vote in Richmond so I don't have to know too much about what's going on but what I read in the papers and hear in the news or hear some of them discuss. In some ways Richmond's gone downhill and it can't seem to build back up.





Dunning: Do you think there's anything that can be done for Richmond's negative image?

Bailey: I just wonder sometimes if there's anything that can be done. I've heard it said that after it once gets down and they get all these outlying places [shopping malls] and people get in the habit of going there, it's pretty hard to bring them back. The only thing they can do maybe is to have a different type of thing, like I've heard them say they were talking about office buildings. So if maybe they could manage that and get people downtown again then maybe that would make the need for some restaurants and so forth. If they could have some kind of a factory down in there that would put people to work maybe that would be a good idea. But they haven't brought in anything that I know about.

Dunning: Do you remember when the downtown was actually booming?

Bailey: Yes. It was pretty full of people there for a long time and the stores were all full of people. I have friends that worked in some of the stores and we've talked about it a little bit.

Dunning: When did it actually start being torn down?

Bailey: It's been several years ago now.

Dunning: You were probably already in San Pablo?

Bailey: Yes.

Dunning: I've heard some people say that it actually started in the fifties and then really finished up in the late sixties.

Bailey: It probably was in along in the sixties. Now if you were talking to Walt Farsow, why he could probably tell you a lot about that.



Dunning: Who is he?

Bailey: He's a man who has quite a bit to do around Richmond. He belongs to the church where I go and sometimes he heads up a class and talks about some of the things about Richmond.

Dunning: It's a familiar name.

Bailey: He used to work in the school department I think.

Dunning: About how old a man is he?

Bailey: Well, I guess Walt must be getting up towards seventy now.

Dunning: Is he a Richmond native?

Bailey: I doubt that. I don't know that for sure. Right now they live out in what we would call El Sobrante, but it's in the Richmond part of El Sobrante I'm pretty sure.

Dunning: When did you stop doing your main shopping in Richmond?

Bailey: When the grocery store began to get out here into El Portal. There were nice places to shop. I really enjoyed that because I could do away with meters. I do my banking at the main branch of the Mechanic's Bank downtown in Richmond but I go down to El Portal mostly to save going downtown into Richmond. I only go there on certain occasions.

Dunning: Do you use Hilltop Mall much?

Bailey: Not an awful lot. I go over there some. It depends on what I want to do. At my age I don't need to do as much shopping as younger people do, not having family and not wearing out my clothes.



Dunning: Hilltop is mostly convenient for clothes shopping.

Bailey: If you want to take a good walk, go over there and take it. I've heard that there are some places that they're doing that. Senior citizens are going real early in the morning to the malls and they're opened up on purpose for them to have their walk inside the mall where they're protected. I think that's wonderful.

Dunning: I've heard that. My sister's in Portland, Oregon, and there are several malls nearby that they open about six-thirty in the morning. They're well lit, they're warm, no rain's going to come in, and they're filled with senior citizens in their running shoes.

Bailey: Yes, go in there and take their walk. Can't hurt a thing. And maybe even have breakfast there afterwards, who knows?

#### Reflection on Richmond's Historical Side

Dunning: Do you see Richmond as a historical place?

Bailey: They've always seemed to think that Point Richmond especially was very early to develop. You hear things about what went on in Point Richmond and some of the old, old buildings that are down there. I don't know whether Richmond itself was so historical. It was maybe connected with some of the early days. They had these Spanish buildings and some of the Spaniards settled in around here.

Dunning: In Contra Costa?

Bailey: Yes, especially in San Pablo area. They have some buildings there. They even moved that old farm house



Bailey: from out here where they started the Hilltop Mall and they moved that to San Pablo, and saved that.

Dunning: Well, do you think that the shipyard years made Richmond historical?

Bailey: It probably did, because they had a lot of fast building going on. They even ran a contest at one time in Yard Two to see how quick they could build a ship. They set a record.

Dunning: For the Robert E. Peary?

Bailey: I forgot the name of the ship. When my son was in the merchant marines during that time he was shipping on those kinds of ships they built there in shipyard number two a whole lot of the time.

Dunning: Did you ever get to know many early Richmond residents, people that were born in Richmond and lived there before the war?

Bailey: Not very many, no. I've known two or three that had been native Californians all their life. They're gone now but they used to talk about things that happened around.

Dunning: I know a few of the older Richmond residents that I've talked to, they had the idea that Richmond was going to return to this small town feeling that they had before the war.

Bailey: This is what my husband was kind of afraid of about buying the property. He was afraid that when the war was over that everybody would leave and the place wouldn't be worth anything or saleable. That was really wrong. Richmond just kept building up, it seemed like, growing. There was a need for places for more people to live.





Bailey: People that had come to California didn't want to leave, it seemed like. They wanted to stay out here and work. The black people found it much better for them if they could, so they managed somehow to stay. I know that they've worked hard, a lot of them have, in order to stay--and I have to give them a lot of credit for just going and doing whatever they could do, see that their children had whatever they wanted them to have and get them educated.

### Visits to Missouri:--Compassion to California

Dunning: Last time you mentioned that you had gone back to Missouri for a few visits?

Bailey: Yes.

Dunning: How did it seem to you when you went back there compared to California?

Bailey: Pretty dreary. Pretty quiet. The same people were around there that you had known when you left and it was kind of interesting to go back and see them of course, but it made you think you didn't want to go back. It did me. Of course, one thing that got better there was when the electricity came for everybody. You see, I knew the days when we had coal oil lights.

We couldn't have refrigerators, and if you had an ice box, where are you going to get your ice and get it home before it all melts to even put in an ice box. You had a cellar to keep food cool underground or people even hung a bucket in the well on a rope to put their milk and butter down there to keep it cool. But that's the way I grew up was my folks had cellars and kept the food in there. In the morning a woman had to



Bailey: clean the lamp globes to be sure they would be ready for night and fill them with oil if they needed it. That was one of your regular chores.

Dunning: Which most people wouldn't understand now.

Bailey: No. They wouldn't know how to begin. When they got to have electricity, and they could have their bathrooms in the house and have their freezers, it made it much easier for them to take care of things. Washing machines came in then. They did have some washing machines that ran with a gasoline motor, but it wasn't like what they have now.

Dunning: Were you ever involved in Richmond politics?

Bailey: No. I worked on election boards for years, but that's all.

Dunning: Are there any politicians or people that have really made it in this area that stand out in your mind or that you particularly admire?

Bailey: No, not particularly, no.

Dunning: How about any national people, politicians?

Bailey: I don't know, I never did get too excited about the politics. As soon as we got television I began to watch the procedures of when they would have the primaries or the conventions and select the delegates. I found that knowledgeable and interesting. I found out how they worked those schemes pretty well. They would be all mad at each other and taking sides, and then when it was through they were just good friends and everything was going great.



Sons' Interest in Family Background

Dunning: Have there been certain things that you've tried to hand down to your sons?

Bailey: I tried to always live the kind of a life that would be exemplary, teaching a few things along, telling them a few things of their family history.

Dunning: Are they interested in their family background?

Bailey: Yes, they are.

Dunning: Do you think your sons feel any roots in the Midwest?

Bailey: I think so, yes. Especially the youngest one. He was young when we came out here but he don't hardly remember back in Missouri. He was just five.

Dunning: Do you think he feels connected to the Midwest?

Bailey: No, I don't. It's a faint memory for him. Of course, he's been back there since--now the older boy, he wanted to go back two or three different times and did go back and visit some of the places that he faintly remembered in his mind. There used to be a stream that we crossed. We just drove down, forded through the water they called it, and he wanted to go back over there while they still had a bridge. So he put his car up on the bridge and then he got back and took a picture.

Then there was a mill down there in Missouri that had been run one time by a grandfather Bailey, great-grandfather. So of course that's always been somewhat of an attraction and the mill has been running all these years.

Dunning: What kind of a mill?



Bailey: A grist mill where they grind corn and wheat and things like that. I've heard in the last few months that they're going to recondition this mill and preserve it even though it was still runnable. But they're going to do some upgrading on it.

Dunning: You mean like an historical site?

Bailey: I think so. That would be interesting to see sometime after that's all done.

### Ambitions Now

Dunning: Do you have any special ambitions now, things you would like to do or places you would like to go?

Bailey: I have traveled quite a little bit and I would like to do a little more.

Dunning: Any places that you think of?

Bailey: I've traveled with my brother and his wife the last few years some and I think we may take another trip this fall back into the middle states, have a family reunion back there, try to keep contact with the family. Since the uncles and aunts are all gone, it's up to the cousins to get together once in a while in order to know each other when you get scattered out.

So we did that a couple years ago and some of the other cousins said, "Now next time you go back let me know. I want to try to get there too." One cousin up in Spokane, Washington is retired now so she'll probably be going back. That's kind of fun.

Dunning: Did many other members of your immediate family move out West?





Bailey: My immediate family were all out here. My parents came out.

Dunning: When did they join you?

Bailey: My two brothers were out here first and they were down around Los Angeles, and then my parents came. It must have been around 1940. They spent the rest of their life in California.

So you see, I didn't have any family back in the Midwest. It was just my husband's parents that were back there. He has a sister in Kansas City. He had a small family. We had the only grandchildren on either side there for a while, and finally my youngest brother got married and he had two children.

### The California Dream

Dunning: You hear so much about the "California dream" and that California is a "mecca." What do you think about that?

Bailey: I think a lot of people get disappointed when they get out here and they don't find everything just as dreamy as they thought it was going to be and so they don't stay. Maybe they stay a while because they have to, but they go back in some cases, I think.

Dunning: What about for your own family?

Bailey: No, we were satisfied in California. It was better for all of us. My brother started working in an aircraft factory down at Los Angeles and his wife was a bookkeeper, and they bought property right away and they built that up. The first thing you know he had quit the job down there and he came out to Canoga Park and put in a business. He made good there. He still



Bailey: owns that property. My nephew is running it now, running the business, and he's got other properties rented. So it turned out well for him.

Dunning: Is there anything else you would like to add either about your own life or about Contra Costa County?

Bailey: That's pretty heavy stuff when you get talking about the county.

Dunning: Yes, I know. That's a Pandora's box. I am mostly doing Richmond, but--

Bailey: I don't know. The main thing I try to do myself now is just keep my health as good as I can so I can take care of myself pretty well.

Dunning: And of course you're still quilting?

Bailey: I'm not quilting anymore I say. I'll do embroidery work and hand work and things like that, perhaps sew a little. I just don't think I want to take on anymore quilts. Too big a job. I made these two pictures on the wall, and I've made some other pictures, and I've done pillows and small items. It's what I want to work with. It's easier for me to handle.

Dunning: If at a later time anything comes to your mind that you think should be recorded, if you have a certain memory, let me know because I do have plenty of tape and it would be easy for me to stop by. As I said, I will be doing an exhibit, so if at some point you're going through your old photographs and you see--

Bailey: I looked a little bit but I didn't find anything that I thought would be helpful, unless I come up on something somewhere else, and I don't know where it would be.

Dunning: Okay. Well, if you do let me know. I never keep anybody's original. What I'll do is make a negative



Dunning: from it and then give you back your original. But I would like to thank you very much. It's been very nice to hear your story.

Bailey: I know there's been a lot of things that won't be of any interest to anyone perhaps, but you can cull them out.

Dunning: Thank you very much.

##

[tape was shut off but turned on again when Mrs. Bailey started to tell me about the reasons for coming to California. - J. K. Dunning]

Bailey: The main reason that we came to California was to try to better ourselves and have a better life and be able to make more money where we could take better care of our family. It had seemed like we weren't getting ahead very fast right away. Then after we got out here we had work, and we began to get ahead and be able to have the things we needed. That's why we were willing to work hard, because we saw it paid off.

Transcriber: David Pollock

Final Typist: Shannon Page



APPENDICES





## ANCESTRAL RECORD

1

Henry Jones, the great, great, great, grandfather of Nelson H. Jones, who was the second son of Dr. Howard Jones of Circleville, Ohio, deceased in his teens and this was written for the young man by his grandfather, Dr. Nelson Jones of Circleville, Ohio, who was the brother of my father, the copist of these notes, for which we are indebted to the Circleville family.

This Henry Jones came from Wales to America in early life and settled in New Jersey. He married Miss Lippincott of Philadelphia, Pa. by whom he had three children; Caleb, Sarah, and Thomas, August 23, 1766 A.D. all in Trenton, New Jersey. The father and mother were both zealous Orthodox Quakers and transmitted to their children a religion pure and undefiled. After the death of his lifelong partner, he came to Ohio in 1801, and a few years after died with acute disease contracted by exposure while out hunting in Champlain County, Ohio. His son, Caleb Jones had no children and lived to the age of 87 years and rests beside his brother, Thomas, in Concord Cemetery, Liberty Township, Ross County, Ohio.

Sarah Jones became Mrs. Joshua Ballinger and the mother of two sons and two daughters; Joshua, Thomas, Sarah, and Hope, who married Admiral Winders. The writer of these notes, copies, remembers a few of her grandfathers annual visits to this cousin, Hope Winders. More than 70 years ago he cherished her as a sister, and Thomas Jones, who died in Champlain County, would be a visitor to see his sister, Sarah, and her family. As I know, he made his home in Ross Co. and my father and mother often spoke of him.

No woman was ever better and more favorably known in Ohio than Hope Winders. She was a pleasant and effective speaker, a fervant every day Christian and was recognized as a leading star preacher in the Orthodox Quaker Church, in the faith and practice of which she lived and at an old age died. The writer of this, Dr. Nelson Jones, born in 1821 or 1822, has many times sat under the sound of her sweet voice.

Thomas Jones, the second son of Henry Jones, married Elizabeth Cox, both Orthodox Quakers of the strictist sort, and lived in Mt. Holly, New Jersey. In 1803, Thomas Jones, with his wife and seven children, moved to Ohio and settled on territorial land which was purchased at the first land sales, and where he made his home until his death, which occurred suddenly while in good health, Jan. 22, 1849, at age 82 years.

Elizabeth (Cox) Jones was born April 20, 1765 and died Sept. 3, 1847 at age 82 years. Thomas and Elizabeth Jones had nine sons and two daughters; William, Henry, Mary, Thomas, Benjamine, Rebecah, Jermiah, Caleb, Joshua, Samuel and Jacob.

William Jones (Ruby's great, great grandfather) married Jan Corken and had six sons and four daughters. Henry Jones married Rachel Corken and had four sons and three daughters. Rebecah Jones married Thomas Corken and had four sons and four daughters. (Henry Jones, the second son of Thomas Jones was born Feb. 20, 1791 at Mt. Holly, N.J. At 25 he married Rachel Corken and lived a happy and prosperous life, and died at his residence on Fruit Hill, Liberty Township, Ross Co. Ohio, March 16, 1871 at the age of 80 years. He was loved and honored by all who knew him and he lived a Christian and died one.

Robert Corken, the father of Rachel (Corken) Jones, was born near Cork Island. He married Grace Mason, 1788, and they had one son and two daughters, Thomas, Jane and Rachel. In 1798, he and his wife and three children left Chester County Co., Pennsylvania and brought their goods across the mountains on a pack saddle to the Ohio River, thence down the Ohio River to the mouth of Scioto (New Portsmouth) on a flat boat. Thence up the Scioto in a dugout. They landed at Highbanks Prairy about the middle of April, 1798, after two months travel. (My grandmother Rachel was born Dec. 23, 1798). He lived the remainder of his days in Ross Co. Ohio and died Oct. 21, 1844 at age 82.



Grace Mason was born at Orchid Hill, near London, England, in 1755. She came to America with her parents thirteen years before the Revolutionary War and resided in Chester Co., Penn. She was the daughter of a Quaker preacher, colonial statesman and soldier. He was a soldier under Charles I and Charles II of England and came to America 13 years before the Revolutionary War. He was the first man to raise his voice from the pulpit and platform against the introduction and trade of slavery on American soil. The partial abolition and limitation of this evil was due to his timely and enthusiastic well organized efforts.

Grace Mason had the following brothers and sisters; Joseph, James, Benjamine, John, George, Daniel, Mary, and another sister whose name was lost. Joseph and Mary Mason never came to America. George Jr. (Mason) settled in Chester Co., Penn, and James in Baltimore, Maryland. John and Benjamine in Maryland also. Daniel Mason died in Chester Co., Penn. while quite young leaving two children who went to Virginia. One of the children, daughter of Daniel Mason, became the mother of General Winfield Scott.

The house that George Mason built (I don't know whether her father or that of her brother George) in which Grace Mason was married to Robert Corken in 1788 is still standing in Chester Co., Penn. The Masons became numerous as a family, were long of life. Benjamine lived over a hundred years. In religion they were Orthodox Quakers.

Rachel Corken had one brother Thomas, born Feb. 29, 1792 and one sister Jane, born 1794. Thomas died in Missouri and is buried in the Ohio Cemetery near Burlington Jct. Mo. Rachel lived with her daughter for years before she died near Burlington Junction, Mo. and is buried in the same family lot with her Johnston daughters. Jane Corkin married William Jones (Ruby's great, great grandfather) Died where she lived, Vige Station, on the old Marietta and Cincinnati Railroad, and is buried in the neighborhood cemetery.





# Quilt display weaves colorful history of Richmond

By Richard Spencer  
The Tribune

For Selena Foster and Vera Jones Bailey, quilting has been a source of enjoyment throughout their lives.

Now their artistic endeavors are being honored in the Richmond Museum's display, "To Keep Somebody Warm — Richmond's History in Quilts."

Drawing record crowds since it opened April 5, the display features the works of Foster, Bailey and some 14 other quilters and quilting groups, whose expert works range from creations with simple patterns involving 400 pieces, to elaborate ones with 5,000.

"Quilting is a great joy and a pleasure; it's creative," said Selena Foster, born in 1916 in Cherokee County, Texas, one of nine children. "I take my nothing, and make something out of it."

Copying off her grandmothers and threading their needles, she learned quilting before she was 9,

and by 16 had acquired professional skills.

Foster, the chairwoman of Eastern Hill Quilters, came here in 1943 with her husband, who went to work in the shipyards. She took a job in the Defense Diner on Cutting Boulevard, but kept her needles sharp.

Widowed, she augments retirement working as a seamstress and making quilts by hand and machine.

"I've two daughters, a 98-year-old mother-in-law, and a grandbaby that I help," Foster said. "I'm their everything, so I have to find time for quilting. I can sit down in the morning over a cup of coffee and quilt. I can do it in the evening. I can get up and miss breakfast any morning and quilt."

She estimates she has pieced more than 50 quilts, and helped with countless others. Examples of her work keep people warm

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Vera Jones Bailey with some of her quilt projects.  
By Richard Spencer/The Tribune

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By Richard Spencer/The Tribune

Selena Foster of Richmond has been a quilter for more than 40 years.

## Quilt

*Continued from Page 1*

throughout the West.

"When I was a child, people made their own bedding," Foster said, "and today I charge from a steal to a giveaway to make a quilt, like \$150 to \$300. I love doing it, and I'm staying with it. It's artistic expression, and I've got a backlog of orders."

Chevron USA and the recreation and parks department provided major funding for the show, which runs through June 22, and includes the film "Quilts in Women's Lives."

Like Foster, Kansas-born Vera Jones Bailey started sewing almost as soon as she could hold a needle, making doll clothes, and joining her mother and sister to make quilts and comforters.

"There used to be a saying," said Bailey, born in 1905, "that if you made a quilt a year, you would have enough bedding. I can remember my grandmother hunting out small needles for me."

Her grandparents lived in a sod house on the prairie, and today Bailey still sews for herself,

making gifts, Christmas tree decorations and sweaters.

Moving to Richmond from Missouri in 1942, she and her husband went to work in the shipyards, where she spent three years as a sheet metal worker.

"Over the years I did a lot of embroidery," said Bailey, who raised three children. "I sewed for my children, and once made a quilt as a gift for a teacher when she got my balky son to go to school."

"I've tried so hard to teach some other people to quilt," she added, "but haven't had much success. I think women are too busy today earning a living."

Machine-made quilts, she said, don't seem right, but lap quilting she could do all day.

Bailey has sewn more than 20 quilts, and given many, including some her mother made, to her children and grandchildren when they married.

A shoulder injury followed by arthritis almost made her stop quilting, but she picked up her needle to teach members of a

quilting group at St. Luke's Methodist Church.

Years ago, Bailey recalled, the price of a quilt was based on how much thread was used. The going rate was \$1 a spool, and a quilt ran \$100 to \$150.

"One of the most exciting parts of the exhibit is peeking into quilter's lives through their displays," said museum spokeswoman Kathleen Rupley.

A museum program gives a detailed biography of each quilter and a short synopsis of that biography is provided on the museum walls next to each display quilt.

"The rich history of the Bay Area is reflected in the quilters' comments, and the program notes go back almost 100 years into the backgrounds of these talented people."

Selena Foster is personally delighted to be involved in this renewed interetingg in quilting. "I think youngsters are picking up quilting," she said. "I think it's returning. To me, it's on the way back. Maybe it never really went away."





# Quilt exhibit to feature films and speakers

RICHMOND — If you haven't seen "To Keep Somebody Warm," the city's history in quilts, this Sunday would be a good day to visit the Richmond Museum because it is the start of National Museum Week.

The quilt exhibit, which continues Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays through June 22, features the works of local artisans.

From Richmond, they are: Vera Jones Bailey, Mollie Bowie, Ethel Carrigan, Selena Foster, Savannah Hadley, Cordelia and Milton Hardy, Lou Allie Heath, Georgianna Beck Lasater, Matti Beckett Mann, Anna Philippi, Clovice Walker, St. Lukes Methodist Quilters, and Easter Hill Methodist Seniors.

The quilts of former Pt. Richmond resident Becky Schaefer, now of Marin County, also are on

display along with those by Alex Anderson of Pinole and Carol Schwartz of El Cerrito.

Three films on quilting will be shown this Friday and Saturday during the museum's regular hours of 1 to 4 p.m.

They are: "Quilting Women," "Anonymous Was a Woman," and "Quilts in Women's Lives."

June 1 will be "Quilt Sharing Sunday, when quilt owners can learn more about the subject from textile experts Inez Brooks-Myers, associate curator of the Oakland Museum's history department, and Juli Silber, curator of the Espirit collection of Amish quilts.

Admission to the museum, located at 400 Nevin Ave., is free. For more information, call 235-7387.



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Photography exhibitions: "Lowell: A Community of Workers,"  
Lowell, MA 1981-1984 (travelling).  
Fishermen by Trade: On San Francisco Bay with the Ghio Brothers"  
Richmond Museum, 1988.

Play: "Boomtown" based on the oral histories of shipyard  
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